

Transition in Northeastern India

Northeastern India and its Neighbours

Negotiating Security and Development

Rakhee Bhattacharya

ROUTLEDGE



Northeastern India and its Neighbours

Transition in Northeastern India

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Abbreviations

AASU All Assam Students Union

ABNES Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj

ADF Arunachal Dragon Force

AFSPA Armed Forces Special Powers Act

APGL Assam Provincial Gurkha League

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BIMSTEC Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation

BIPA Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement

BRIC Brazil, Russia, India and China

BSF Border Security Force

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

CIS Commonwealth of Independent States

CMEPSP Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress

CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

CPI Communist Party of India

CPN Communist Party of Nepal

DGHC Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council

FDI

Foreign Direct Investment

FICN

Fake Indian Currency Note

FTA

Free Trade Agreement

GAIL

Gas Authority of India Limited

GDP

Gross Domestic Product

GNH

Gross National Happiness

GNI

Gross National Income

GNLF

Gorkha National Liberation Front

HDR

Human Development Reports

IBG

International Border Gate

IBOP

International Border Outpost

IBV

International Border Villages

IBWBF

International Barbed Wire Border Fence

ICC

International Chamber of Commerce

ICPWD

Indian Central Public Works Department

IDMC

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

IFG

International Frontier Guard

IM(D)Ts

Illegal Migrants (Determination) Tribunals
Act Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act

IMDT

ISI Inter-Services Intelligence

KIA Kachin Independence Army

KIO Kachin Independent Organisation

LAC Line of Actual Control

LCS Land Customs Station

LDC Least Developed Countries

MDONER Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region

MGC Mekong–Ganga Co-operation

MHA Ministry of Home Affairs

NBCC National Buildings Construction Corporation Ltd

NDFB National Democratic Front of Bodoland

NEFA North-East Frontier Agency

NER Northeastern Region

NGO Non-governmental Organisation

NIC National Identity Card

NNC Naga National Council

NRC National Register of Citizens

NSCN (IM) National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)
NSCN (K) National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)

ONGC

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited

PIP

Prevention of Infiltration into India of Pakistani Nationals

PLA

People's Liberation Army

RBA

Royal Bhutan Army

RGB

Royal Government of Bhutan

SAARC

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SLR

Self-Loading Rifles

SME

Small and Medium Enterprises

SPA

Seven Party Alliance

TAR

Tibet Autonomous Region

UID

Unique Identification

ULFA

United Liberation Front of Assam

UN

United Nations

UNDP

United Nations Development Programme

UNLF

United National Liberation Front

USDP

Union Solidarity and Development Party

VIC

Voter Identity Card

WDR

World Development Report

WTO

World Trade Organization

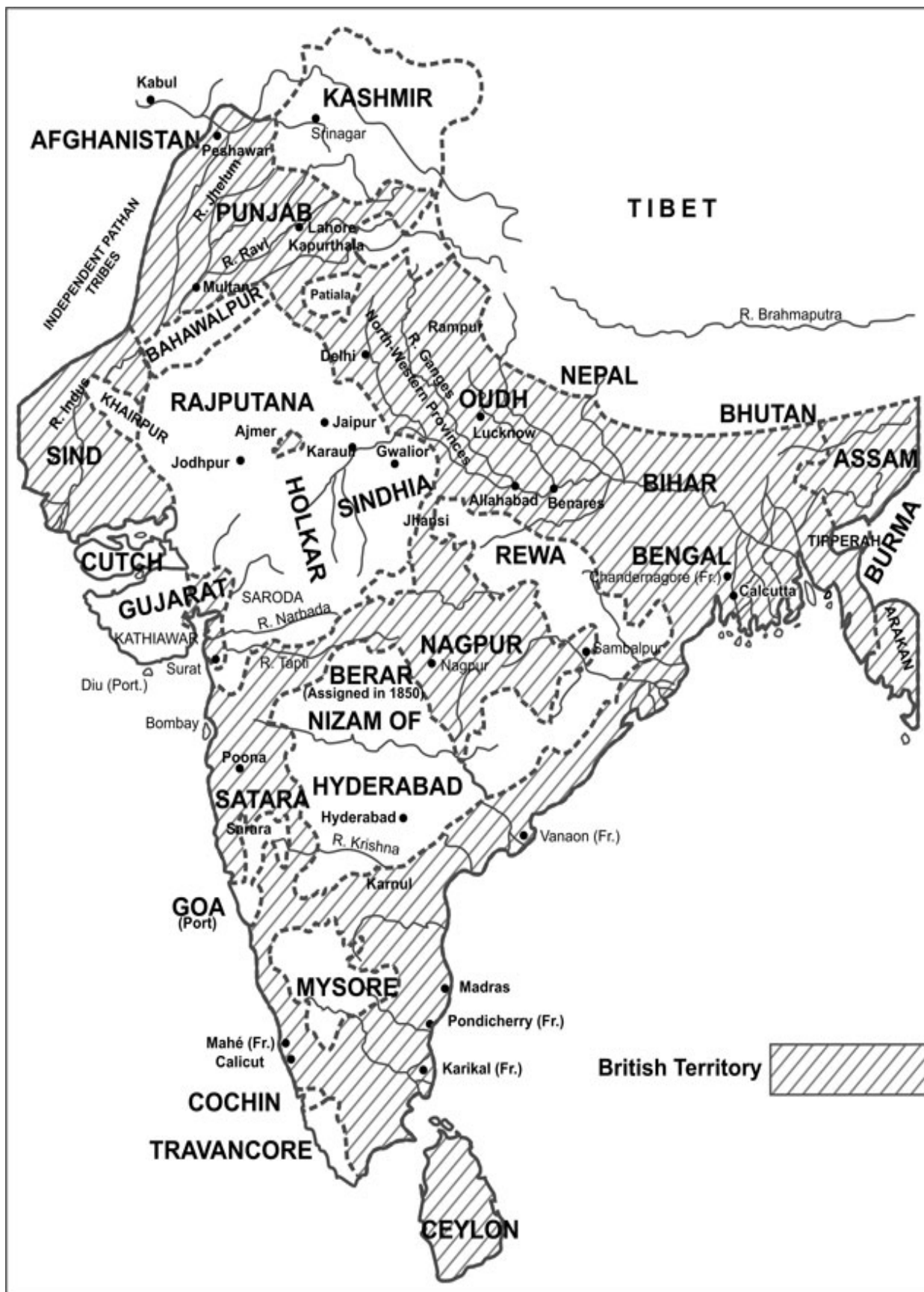
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The book could not have seen the light of the day without the fellowship granted to me by MAKAIAS, Kolkata, in December 2008. My foremost thanks, therefore, are due to MAKAIAS for all its logistical, financial and academic support for my research. This is an extension of my earlier volume on *Development Disparities in Northeast India* (2011), which dealt with issues in the region within its existing political and geographical boundaries. The present volume goes beyond these boundaries and connects the Northeast with the neighbouring nations. During the long four years it has taken to write this book, I was relocated from Kolkata to New Delhi, joining the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS), devoted to democratising the formation and implementation of public policies. I would like to take the opportunity to express my sincere thanks to RGICS for providing me with the platform to complete the book with wider understanding.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my loving family that has supported me in all my endeavours, understanding and accepting all my limitations and imperfections; they remain the ultimate source of my inspiration. I humbly dedicate the book to my beloved mother who has inspired me with the strength to go through life with faith and conviction. The views expressed in this book are solely mine, and not of RGICS, where I am placed now.

Map I: India on the Eve of the Sepoy Revolt 1856



Source: All maps courtesy of the author and not to scale.

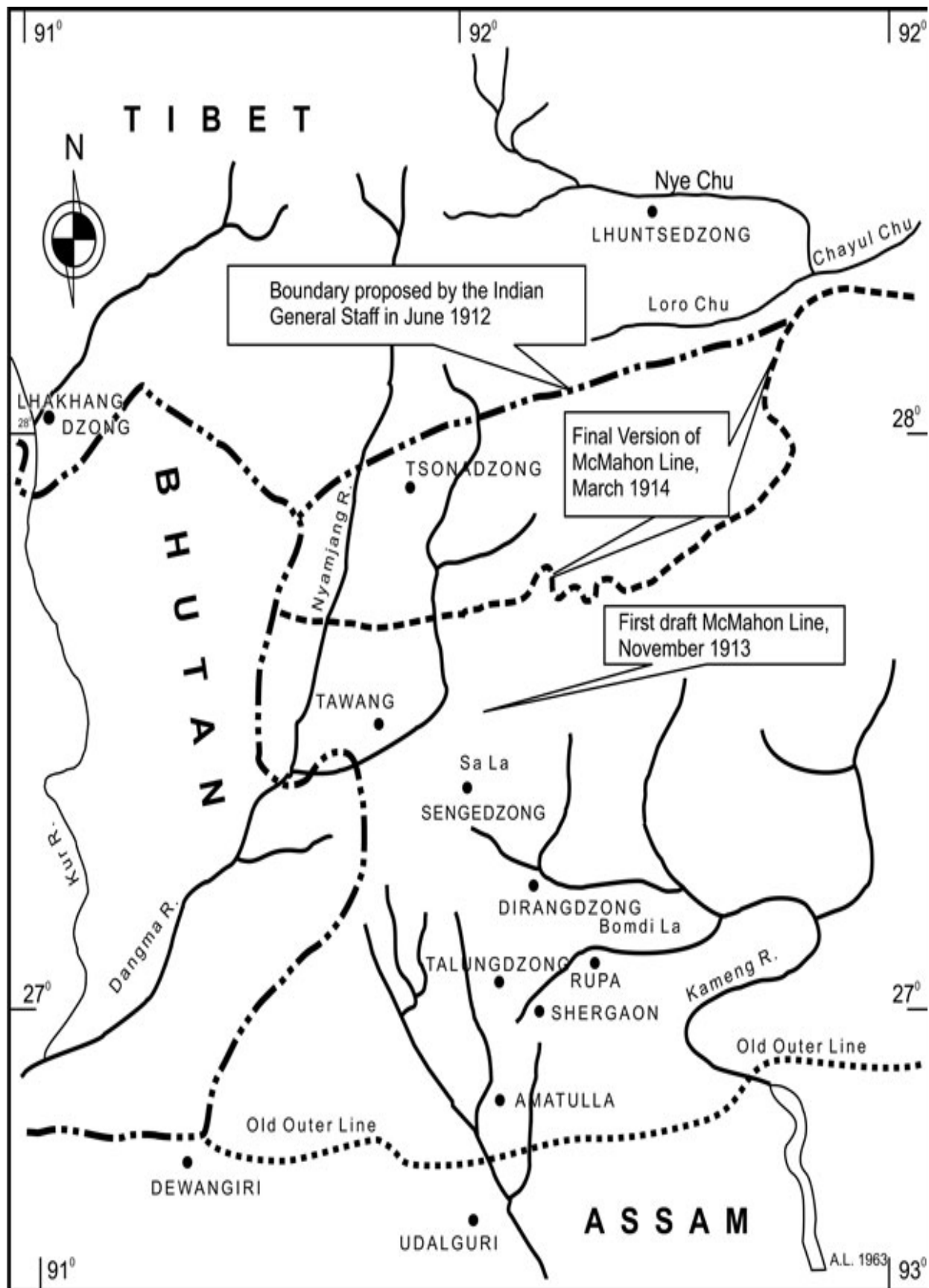
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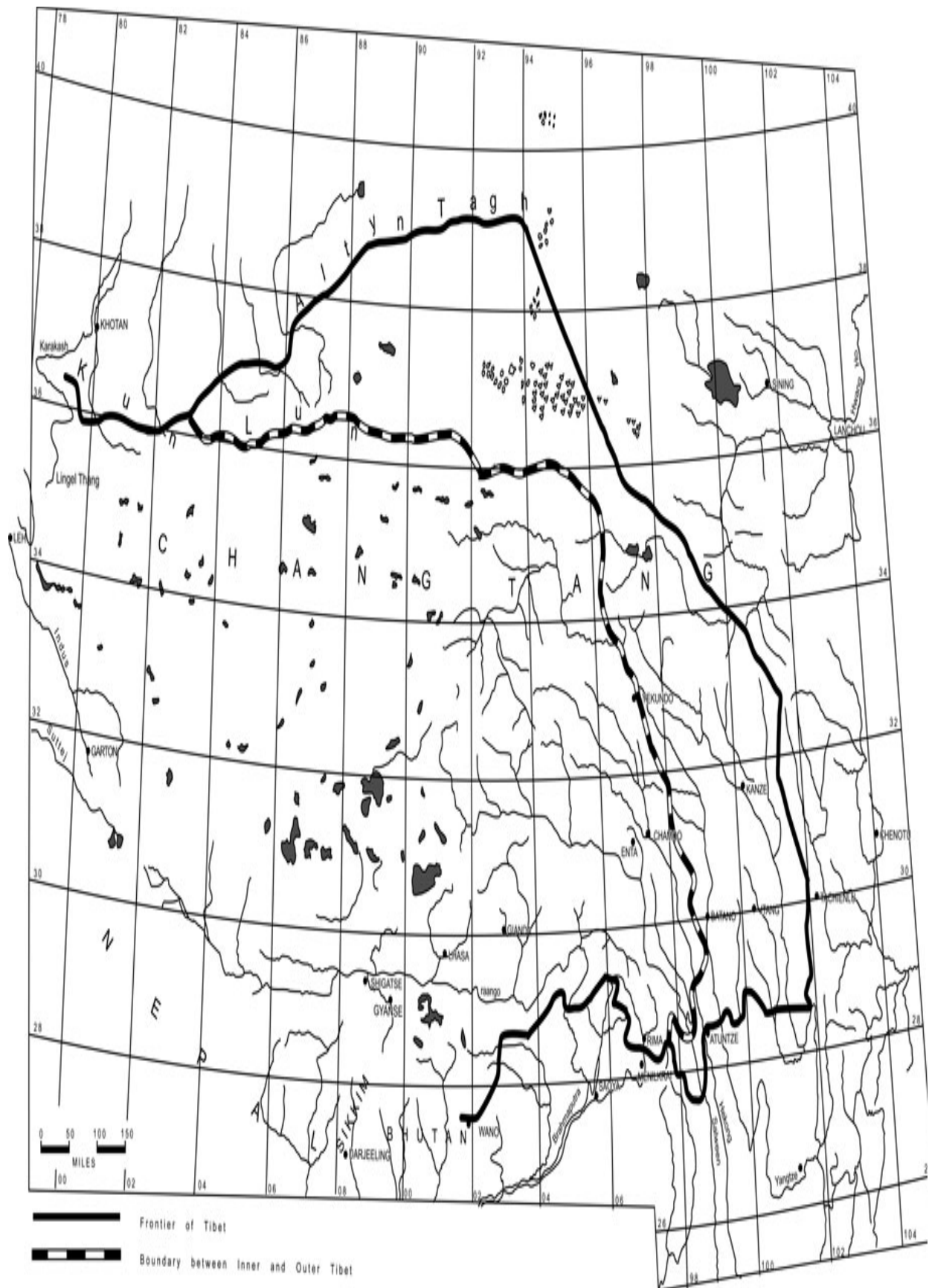
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Introduction

Borders and Borderland

EFFECTS OF BORDERS ON SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Security threats and development differentials in contemporary India can no longer be examined in isolation. Both issues need to be inter-linked and contextualised along with historical trends and with emerging realities of contemporary India having transnational and cross-border spaces. As the country is

surrounded by several volatile and underdeveloped neighbours, India's frontier regions are mostly exposed to

various cross-border security threats. Border creation, its disputes, the subsequent cross-border threats, and then resolving their issues in the Indian subcontinent has always remained a grave challenge, more prominently during the post-Independence period. As transborder conflicts tend to spill over into neighbouring frontiers, it tends to strain the bilateral relations on the fault-line of security issues. This necessarily affects the

development process, natural human interaction and its civilisational discourse in long run. Throughout the human history of mobility and interaction, the space for development and progress have been attempted to be restrained by the various counter forces. Such counter forces have feared free exchange of ideas between peoples, and have created artificial barriers and constructed the notion of security as a prime concern across such boundaries, on one hand. On the other, natural borders and boundaries created by rivers, lakes, mountains, and deserts have

helped organic habitats to grow with different distinct human groups and identities; these were never meant to divide humanity, create conflicts and to bring security threats. Rather, people dared to cross all such barriers and have remained the greatest force to drive the progress of civilisation and the development of mankind through the assimilation of cultures, economies and philosophies. Thus, as argued by T. K. Oommen, such ‘continuous rise and fall, the construction and deconstruction of various types of borders is the very story of human

civilisation’ (1995: 251–68). Much beyond survival, the eternal human spirit of inquiry and adventure spirit, aptly expressed by Lord Tennyson in ‘Ulysses’ (1842) — ‘to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield’ — has always been the guiding light for the movement of people across all barriers. In seeking a new frontier, people have been seeking a new freedom. But manmade borders are the conscious attempts to divide and delimit humanities and restrict their freedom to move and to develop. India is the glaring example of such destiny. India, as a newly-born nation in 1947, had to inherit a series of complicated border issues and

creation of borderlands, which delimited the previous space for free interaction and progress, aggravated borders of irritations and uncertainties, and finally created security threats. Even during the British Raj, the

practices of drawing political and strategic borders and creation of frontier and buffer regions for their vested economic and strategic interests had adversely affected the organic connections and historical relations between local people across the region. It had immensely benefited the British interests of domination and exploitation, but had left a deep scourge in the subcontinent in years to come and its people to suffer. According to David

Ludden,

[i]n the 14th century, South Asia became a region of travel and transport, connecting central Asia and Indian ocean. This redefined the location of all its agrarian territories. In the wake of Mongals,

overland corridors of routine communication extended from the Silk Road to Kanya Kumari and branched out to seaports along the way.

Connections among distant parts of Eurasia became numerous and routine. New technology, ideas, habits, languages, people and needs came into centuries when a visible increase in farming intensity was also reshaping agrarian

South Asia (1999: 113).

Such a vibrant regional progress, through many natural human movements and interactions that even helped to evolve a sustainable and natural agrarian economic development in South Asia, had reconfigured with change of the rule and the ruler. With the advent of the British, a massive restructuralisation towards modernisation in heavy industry, trade and infrastructure had taken place. Territories were redefined through new borders and

boundaries, routes were created through new trade relations with a fresh strategy for the Imperial economy to

develop. Thus, the region grew with a new order, painfully losing its old economic network, cultural links and human communications. In this new order, human mobility was redefined in terms of migration and immigration

across the newly-created borders. Various Western theories and ideas were being fitted

into the local areas of Indian subcontinent. Thus, according to Walter Leimgruber (who much later analyses the Swiss–Italian border area), manmade boundaries are an expression of territoriality, reflecting a basic human need to live in a bounded space. He thinks borders separate, reflecting centripetal forces within territories.

However, since territories meet at boundaries, they are also points or lines of contact, favouring centrifugal tendencies. Border zones, thus, become visible with both these forces, visible in a variety of installation on and

movement across the boundary (Leimgruber 1991: 43). The similar scenario of movement of people across the

border gradually started emerging in the border zones of Indian subcontinent also, and began to cause internal imbalances in various facets like demography, economy, polity, and security.

India's challenge to such imbalances became sharper in the year 1947 and in its aftermath when the country attained freedom along with the tragedy of division and artificial border accompanied by pain and misery for

millions. This was more pronounced and profound in her frontier regions. As Noorani rightly remarked, the

partition of Indian subcontinent during the freedom deserves to be ranked as one of the top 10 tragedies in

recorded human history. Along with loss of human lives and property, people were uprooted, leaving an

impoverished culture behind them (2012: 73). The Eastern and Northern frontiers started facing severe challenges, concerning their newly created unfriendly neighbours; the inflow and outflow of a large number of people for

sheer existence continue to create tremendous pressure and imbalance. There was an urgent need of a mature and comprehensive political and diplomatic roadmap to resolve such threats and conflicts across the borders. Apart from such manmade borders, other natural borders of India's subcontinent, which remained most formidable and

tranquil for centuries, also started becoming volatile due to the change in political discourse. Since time

immemorial, the lofty Himalayas, according to B. C. Upreti, acted as a natural barrier and natural protector for the Indian subcontinent against any invaders from the North. But the politico-strategic position of the same

Himalayas however had drastically changed after British withdrawal from the subcontinent. On the other hand, with newly embraced communism, the Asian giant China emerged as a major power in the continent, and its actions in

Tibet (in 1950) extensively threatened India's strategic interests in the Himalayas, which altered the defence parameters in the region all together (Upreti 2001: 33). This has dramatically shifted

the security parameters in India's Northeast frontier in years to come. Mohd. Wasim has, therefore, rightly

argued that,

[t]he 1940s saw huge change in South Asia with the Partition and India in 1947 (resulting in the establishment of the two new states of India and Pakistan), and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. One of the basic policies for the new Indian government was that of maintaining cordial relations with China by

reviving its ancient friendly ties (2010).

The newly-born India with her vulnerable frontiers became exposed to various threats of security parameters from her immediate neighbours and, thus, had to become strategically skilful to deal with such neighbours, more

emphatically for her frontier regions, who had to bear the brunt most. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru then had played the most matured role to evolve country's regional policy with extreme skill and understanding. He made

tremendous efforts to create a bond of friendship and trust with all the neighbouring nations, respected their sovereignty, and signed various friendship treaties to establish and then strengthen bilateral relations with

these nations, who otherwise had high potentials to destabilise India's borderlands. Such attempts were also to resolve border disputes, avoid irritations and restrict further threats. But the borderlands like her Northeast

in reality could hardly have any respite, whose unique positioning along with her history made her to suffer

perpetually. The region in the post-Independence period became landlocked, sharing almost 98 per cent of its

borders with international neighbours, which remained mostly porous. It became a fertile ground for large number of transborder, unaccounted movements of people, illegal trading activities and migration of refugees, which

created friction and conflicts within the region, placing it within the security paradigm while utterly

neglecting the most needed discourse, that is, its development and economy. The lives and livings of millions

eventually in the frontier regions of India became miserable with the rising concepts of territory and

nation-state along with the importance of security.

To understand more deeply about the border issues and its direct impact on Northeast India's security and development, clarity on the term border is essential. The conceptual distinctions of boundary and border says

that the former can be drawn both within and across the nation, which is a demarcation indicating some division in spatial terms; the later is primarily to draw lines and demarcate the nations and,

thus, can be termed as an international boundary line. Bradley J. Parker defines border as a linear dividing line fixed in a particular space, meant to mark the division between political and administrative units (2006:

77–100). Such dividing lines can have tremendous barrier effects. Itzhak Galnoor (1995) analyses such barrier

effect on social and economic processes which would otherwise transgress them without interference. Borders,

therefore, contain regions of political and social integration and restrict the flow of communication and the

formation of social and psychological association with areas and population lying beyond the boundary. Thus,

forceful restriction on the flow of communication brings tension and conflicts, which became apparent in India's Northeast, the region which is mostly surrounded by borders and bordering nations. Studying and understanding

border, therefore, is imperative to understand Northeast India's destiny. Border study in general is a recent

phenomenon and according to Vladimin Kolossov (2005), such study emerged during the late 19th century. Early

scholars on border studies have emphasised the evolution and contemporary characteristics of specific land

borders, by collecting empirical data and mapping economic and social structures through case studies. In the

early 20th century, scholars such as Lord Curzon, Charles Fawcett and Thomas Holdich sought to develop border

typologies and classification for the purposes of applied geopolitical strategy. By the 1960s, border study

scholars such as J. R. V. Prescott, Julian Minghi and Gerald Blake broadened their analysis to include the flow of people, services and goods as well as the relationship between natural and social landscapes. Attention, thus, moved away from the study of evolution and changes of the territorial line to the border, more complexly

understood as a site through which socio-spatial differences are communicated. Thus, there has been a move away from boundary to border studies reflecting a shift in research focus, no longer about where the border is but how it is socially constructed and reproduced in terms of symbol, signs, identifications, representations,

performance, and stories (Vaughan-Williams 2009). Northeast India's border perspective also can be placed in such a paradigm, where borders and bordering nations have persistently remained important for the country's social, economic and security constructs. Study of borders, in general, has now become the study of any area that

involves the totality of the elements which when combined gives character to a place (Gildersleeve 1976: 19–28).

Northeast India needs to be seen and studied along her long borders, whose

barrier-effect over a period has painfully disturbed its stability, peace and development.

Since Northeast India interchangeably is termed here as borderland and frontier, it needs some clarity in meaning. The frontiers, as Parker argues, are the areas between places at the edge of cultural spheres and,

therefore, embody the loci within which cultural contact takes place. Frontiers come into being as a result of particular historical discourse and are unique social phenomena. Frontiers can be extremely dynamic or often

unstable zones, as the nature of interaction taking place here can be influenced by variety of geography,

political, demographic, cultural, and economic factors (Parker 2006: 77–100). Borderland, on the other hand, as Parker points out is region around or between political or cultural entities where geographic, political,

demographic, cultural, and economic circumstances or processes may interact to create borders or frontiers

(ibid.). The frontier means a zone of contact with or without a specified boundary line, and borderland straddles the distinction between frontier and border, often used as a synonym for frontier as a zone. As narrated by John P. Augelli 'borderland ... tend historically to be zones of cultural overlap and political instability where the national identity and loyalties of the people often become blurred' (1980: 19–35). Robert R. Alvarez Jr is of the opinion that although there are hundreds of political borders in the world, the idea of borderlands as an area of study stems primarily from the work done by social scientists along the Mexican US political boundary. This

border has become the icon and model for the research into other borders, which led to elaboration and refinement of borders with concepts and referents (1995: 447–70). But it has been found across the world that creation of borders have left significant impacts on the people of borderlands and frontiers to the maximum in various ways, and, therefore, perpetually demands an efficient border management policy. This book also would like to bring to focus that the borderland of Northeast India has historically remained the worst sufferer due to its border

creation, disputes and cross-border leverages and, therefore, demands a very efficient border management policy to restore its stability and peace.

The reiteration and emphasis on territorial borders by the newly-born Indian nation, whose geographical location became strategically important in the subcontinent gained importance to construct her power relations with the neighbouring nations. This is not a unique phenomenon in this nation. Territorial

boundary, which is primarily a geographical manifestation of the state's authority emphasises how geography

influences largely the state and various other human events, more categorically the political events between

states, having geographic boundary. Jean Gottman identifies the varied meanings attributed to territory by

various disciplines. According to him politicians view territory mainly in terms of population and resources, the military perceives it as topography dictating tactical and strategic considerations, the jurists look at

territory as a matter of jurisdictions, experts on International Law find territory as an expression of

sovereignty and its spatial enforcement, and the geographers identify territory as part of an expanse defined by boundaries for specific purposes (Gottman 1973). All these views are important for political decisions of a

nation-state and its territorial matters and drawing of artificial political and strategic boundaries and

borders. Galnoor further finds the necessity to link a particular territory to one particular group, which he

thinks is essential to the definition of the modern nation-state. It leads to the question of having a

territorial boundary to that national group having common heritage and language. Territory in singularity is

extremely passive and can be a motivating and activating factor only through human beliefs and actions.

Therefore, territory in the modern state has a specific function — it is the expression of political power, the control of access to distinguish between the included and excluded determination of social relations defined as citizenship, and also remains instrumental in international relations according to territorial partitions between states. This approach bestows on territory a central role in collective behaviour while eliminating most of its emotional content (Galnoor 1995). Thus, drawing of borderlines and then creation of borderlands are the outcomes of the creation of territory and establishment of modern states all over the world (Baud and Van Schendel 1992: 211–42). According to R. E. Kasperson and J. V. Minghi (1969) territorial borders gained importance by the

political geographers across the world just before and after the First World War, when they attempted to

understand why and where state boundaries were being drawn and to describe borders in such terms as good, bad, artificial, and natural. By the Second World War, the emphasis had shifted more towards the role and function of borders for power relations. Central to this changing perspective was the recognition of international borders as the contact points between territorial power structure and not just demarcation of

national sovereignty. Border from this point of view can become an index to the power relations of the contending forces on either side (Kasperson and Minghi 1969). Thus, strategic and territorial parameters of drawing borders and emphasising its need continued to gain attention. But much later, in the 1980s, with the emergence of

globalisation as a major theme in the world stage, the idea of a new global compact started to emerge by

re-drawing the parameters on economic partnership and co-operation which, to a large extent, blurred the

importance of political borders, and gained much importance in the economic sense. The world order for the next couple of decades focused on optimising economic gains through trade and financial parameters. Various policies and regulations were initiated to simplify border rules and improve regional co-operation and understanding

primarily for economic benefits, which could improve the lives and livings of millions, both in rich and poor

nations. But this in reality has increased the gap between the rich and poor nations, and has widened horizontal inequalities, provoking several armed conflicts across the world of have-nots. Various armed movements and

militancy operations through terrorism and other non-state activities started popping up in different parts of the world, through various intricate and interconnected global networks. Finally, the 9/11 episode again forced the world to seriously question such global compact. Homeland security started to resurface, demanding

well-functioning borders, while accepting trade, travel and other cross-border exchanges that supported the

livelihood of people on different sides of the border.

Coming to the Indian context, during the time of Independence the political challenge of this newly-created nation was to make space for all diversities and differences under the core principle of nationhood, laying

emphasis on different regions and peripheries. With this political vision, when the country was challenged by

several divisive forces, especially from its borderlands, which already had a deep-rooted sense of alienation

from the Indian heartland and perceived closer connections across the border, India tried to address these

problems through various coercive measures. By then these borderlands had already started to become hotbeds of militancy and secessionist movements. These could not be altogether eliminated even after more than six decades of Independence, when India attained worldwide admiration as a vibrant democracy, with political sovereignty and economic self-sufficiency. But its political functioning has failed to contain the various cross-border conflicts that affected her borderlands, such as the Northeast, to a very significant extent. As the Northeast shares the longest international border with a number of countries, and

because of the porous nature of these borders, various militant outfits have used the neighbouring nations for various purposes, such as shelter, training and financial support. Northeast India's journey can, therefore,

never be understood fully without taking its borders and bordering nations into consideration and looking at

their roles, functions and strategic position as an index of power relations of the connecting forces on either side.

P. S. Datta rightly argued that the proximity of international borders in Northeast India (nearly 4,000 km), with the people on the other side belonging to more or less the same roots, the region stands aside differently from the rest of India. Traditionally acknowledged trade routes have turned out to be super highways of drug

trafficking. The age-old togetherness on both sides of the international boundary is snapped by the compulsions of the sanctity of the so-called nation-state, and the natural friends of yesteryears have turned to be the

strongholds for anti-Indian activities (Datta 1996: 85). The British Imperialists are extensively responsible for such unique and vulnerable positioning of this region. The argument of Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel fits into the case of Northeast borderland, when they say that borders become the markers in two ways. First, they

reveal the territorial consolidation of states. Most states try to curb regional autonomy and become no longer content with the 'rough edge'. This became clear in case of the colonial and post-colonial states in the

so-called Third world, and second, borders become the markers of actual power that states wielded over their own societies, and the leaders of new states adopt the ambitious goal of making the state the dominant force in their societies, which often fail because of the opposition from a stubborn society. Confrontation between the state and people is actually clear in marginal areas such as borderland (Baud and Van Schendel 1992: 211–42).

NORTHEAST INDIA'S UNEASY FRIENDS

Locating Northeast once again in pan-Indian political history, B. C. Verghese is of the opinion that history never reveals that the region, by and large, was a part of the mainland imperial Mauryan, Gupta or Mughal

empires. The advent of the British in the 19th century incorporated it into Indian

empire though much of the extensive tribal territory it encompassed was kept isolated as a matter of deliberate policy. The Anglo-Burmese war saw the expulsion of the Burmese with the treaty in Yandaboo in 1826.¹ Lower Assam was annexed and the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys were opened for the expansion of British rule in the Northeast frontier. Upper Assam was briefly restored to Ahom rule, and when the arrangement failed, the territory was taken over in 1838. An era had ended and the turmoil that endangered soon compelled further British intervention. Thus, a forward policy was ensured (Verghese 1996: 10–23). For more than a century, the British had ruled this land, using it as an economic asset. The territorial restructuring began after closing relations with Burma and relocating it with other neighbouring nations. For example, with another neighbor Nepal, as pointed out by A. C. Sinha and T. B. Subba, the centuries-old flow of natural movement of

people, pilgrimage, and trade were restricted with the advent of British and its empire, who then became the

catalyst for an organised migration of people from Nepal hills to the Indian frontier for their economic and

military purposes (2003: 13–14). The treaty of Sagauli in 1815² pushed the Nepal border west from Tista to the Mechi River, parts of the intervening territory being restored to Sikkim from which Darjeeling was secured as a ‘gift’ in 1835 as a hill resort or sanatorium. British influence in Sikkim also

continued to grow with the establishment of a residency under a political officer in 1889 (Verghese 1996: 10–23).

Thus, British assertiveness in this region stemmed from their interest in Burma and the emergence of Chittagong as a port with a railway link serving the commercially promising hinterland, newly acquired in the Northeast.

Similar restructuring had happened along Tibetan region by drawing the McMahon Line³ and creating eventually the Northeast Frontier. This restructuring of political boundary continued till India's Partition, when Radcliffe line⁴ was drawn to demarcate India and Pakistan. Such restructuring and re-mapping of Northeast India through border creations had drastically changed the future discourse of the region, which has been territorialised as an isolated and landlocked area

bordered by many countries have become a constant source of irritation to this remote region. Such a process of re-territorialisation has not only disrupted the natural, historical, ethnic, economic, and cultural relations between people across the borders, but has also set new power relations with its neighbourhood, based on security concerns.

Such a scenario is not unique and is prevalent in many other parts of the world. As

argued by Baud and Van Schendel, the mapping of modern borders, a process first perfected in Europe and soon

applied to all over the world, symbolises a collective attempt by the state-elites to establish a worldwide

system of clear cut territorial jurisdiction and to have their legal and political sovereignty confirmed

cartographically and then proceed to the three states of establishment, demarcation and control of the borders.

As a result, the conflicting territorial claims by the negotiating states could not be ignored, and had to be

resolved by means of engagement, confrontation and arbitration (Baud and Van Schendel 1992: 211–42). Northeast India similarly has become an area, where the power of State turned it into a theatre with complex issues of

security, with almost 98 per cent of its borders being shared with foreign countries such as China, Tibet,

Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. It has, therefore, now become almost impossible to contextualise this

borderland without connecting it to the cultural, social, economic, political, and ethnographic dynamics of the neighbouring nations, both subjectively and objectively. The physical limitations to free trade and movement,

enforced by the borders, have affected the growth and development of the region to a large extent. Such

international borders, according to Hastings Donnan and T. M. Wilson, are marks of the physical limits of state power and are the spatial expression and states' political organisation and territorial divisions (Donnan and

Wilson 1999). J. W. House, therefore, correctly argues that, 'there is an urgent need both for empirical and

comparative studies of a dynamic nature for the border situations, whether involve confrontational or

co-operative relationship, and for more coherent set of theoretical frames within which to study such situation'

(1982: 264). This volume shows such dynamics in Northeast India, where borders were drawn, demarcated and

controlled by the State authority. As a result, the region was confronted with several conflicts, where the

people suffered both in the complex set of security nuances and in the ambience of neglected economy. It,

therefore, explores an alternative normative framework of security development inter-linkages in the Northeast along with the transnational space of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and China. The research concerns of

this framework, therefore, focus on the following areas, also discussed elsewhere extensively by scholars such as J. R. V. Prescott (1987: 159–74). Each chapter here has looked into the following areas

independently:

- (a) The effect of border upon security parameters and economic activities, (b) The impact of the border on the lives and attitude of border inhabitants, (c) The effect of the border upon state policy of security and development, and (d) The political border as an element of cultural landscape.

It needs to be remembered that the traditional borderland and border studies focus on and adopt a view from the centre, from where power is mostly exercised and policies are evolved. But as pointed out by Baud and Van

Schendel, these arguments and studies also need to be viewed from the peripheral borderland, where the impact of borders are felt, primarily to understand better the social, political and economic consequences of such borders and comparing then through time and space (1992: 211–42). This book attempts to enter into the much debated

issues of security and development of Northeast India by studying and critiquing the States' decisions and

policies, and then locating the voices of the people of the region, reflecting both their aspirations and

grievances. The resource and information gap show that the researchers have failed so far to connect these two pivotal issues of Northeast India in the context of its neighbouring nations at one forum. Policies, therefore, had

to deal with large vacuum and ineffectiveness. As pointed out by Gurudas Das (2012), the rise of ethnic

militancy within the region in the 1980s had an adverse impact on its development, making it hostage to security concerns of the Indian state vis-à-vis its Northeastern borders. The consequent underdevelopment led to a rise in internal insecurity. He, therefore, makes an important attempt to examine the inter-linkages between external

security threats, economic underdevelopment, and internal insecurity, which he thinks had led to a conflict-trap in the region. The most recent well-crafted policy document for the region, the *North East Region Vision 2020*

Report,⁵ published in 2008, has also tried to identify correctly that internal security of the region needs to be resolved through the diplomatic initiative with Northeast India's

neighbourhood. Such an initiative can probably seamlessly blend India's foreign policy with its economic

development for the Northeast. The policy document has also pointed out that to address the challenges of border disputes, its management is essential, as the region shares such a large border with

international neighbours. The vision statement of 2020 even suggested setting up a branch secretariat of the

Ministry of External Affairs in the region to step up diplomatic initiatives and to resolve outstanding issues and promoting good relations with neighbouring countries of Northeast India. This is a most welcoming and

appropriate vision for the region and demands prompt implementation. As many of the earlier policies remained

notional and to remind the readers, more than two decades back in 1991, while India crafted a bold alternative foreign policy called the 'Look East'

Policy, the thinkers and scholars of Northeast were jubilant with the idea of revival of the region through such policy initiatives. It was wishfully thought that all the problems of

Northeast India and its cross-border threats, such as illegal trade, terrorism, drugs, and arm supply, would see a solution through ambitious economic resurgence and development, and by establishing cross-border connectivity through legal trade and economic exchanges. But more than 20 years have passed, and Northeast India still remains *problematique* to the nation. Interestingly, the *North East Region Vision 2020 Report* (2008: 285–86) also has made some fresh and specific recommendations and amendments to the ‘Look East’ policy, which are:

- (a) The Northeast region can resolve its security issues by promoting both active economic and popular cultural interactions with its neighbouring nations.
- (b) For an immediate boost to border trade for specific economic sectors, such as agricultural and some industrial products, the current restrictions on borders via Moreh, Nathu La and others need to be removed.
- (c) To reduce the cost of agricultural and meat products in Northeast India, an unrestricted trade with neighbouring countries needs to be promoted.
- (d) In case of neighbouring countries, which are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), formal request for trade facilities would improve trade access for the Northeastern states.
- (e) The industrial output of the region should cater to the demand for industrial goods in the neighbouring countries in the long run. This is important for border trade in items such as cement, coal, timber, and steel.
- (f) For facilitating trade, it is essential to activate existing land-customs stations and provide a secure transport corridor to traders.
- (g) In the long run, Northeast India needs to be a part of growing trade relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, particularly in items such as wood products, ores and rubber

products. Also an integrated Information Technology (IT) facility is essential to improve infrastructure for

trade with ASEAN countries.

But again five years have passed since the initiation of this policy document, and Northeast India continues to wait for resolutions to its security problems and border disputes, while development issues are at limbo. The

region still needs to depend on New Delhi-centric policies, where the voices of the people from the region are not heard. More policy research and initiatives within an inclusionary and democratic frame are, therefore,

essential to break the existing traps of security and underdevelopment in the region. It is also time to revisit and question the existing political economy of the region to address such multi-stage problem and the paradox as well as the gap between economic potential and performance in the region. The book makes an attempt to understand how the country for a long period has failed to evolve a normative frame to deal with such whole range of issues and pushed the region in such perilous path.

The opening chapter of the book identifies the general concerns of interlinking the issues of security and development across the world, which are increasingly gaining importance in broader and multiple ways. Economic prosperity and security perceptions today hardly have any scope left to discuss, in mutually exclusive paradigms; rather, they are closely-connected to resolve the issues for human welfare. In the South Asian scenario, such

interlinkage is even more important and needs deep-rooted analysis, as conflicts, violence, grievances, and

underdevelopments are more visible here. For example, India's rising concerns of internal security, social

exclusion and marginalisation of communities and regions have deeply threatened its concept of inclusive

development. Yet the concern, often expressed, is that there is an utter lack of comprehensive studies and

research on this. In such a backdrop, the borderland of Northeast India needs careful understanding. The debate on mutual inclusivity of security-development paradigms can well be tested in India's Northeast, whose roots are traced to the transborder space. This chapter puts a link between these two related

concepts in a context that will be explored throughout the book.

The five core chapters of this book deal explicitly with Northeast India's borders and the neighbouring nations of China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Each of these also explores India's persistent attempt to

stabilise bilateral relations with these neighbouring countries through a Northeast perspective. Historically, the free movement of people across these bordering nations had assimilated cultural ties and improved the economy and trade. Such a scenario changed with the demarcation of border and restrictions imposed on the movement of

people. Nations which were historically connected to Northeast India, became unfriendly neighbours over a period of time with the changing political and strategic discourses, and eventually have become sources of security

threats to the region, except Bhutan. These chapters analyse such security threats with each of these nations and look for a forward policy with a constructive engagement in the line of development and economic co-operation.

Both secondary and field work analyses are put together to justify the fact that Northeast India's

security-development parameters cannot be understood in isolation and bordering nations also need to be placed in such context. The region, for example, has been the victim of transnational migration, both due to historical and geopolitical reasons, which have affected the social, economic and security dynamics of the region. Added to

this, other cross-border activities, such as drug trafficking, militancy and illegal trade, have damaged the

region's harmony, and converted it into a conflict zone. The prime argument, therefore, evolves with an

understanding of demarcation of such borders and the eventual volatility across these bordering nations. Added to this, the persistent backwardness in some of the neighbouring nations, such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Tibetan region of China, has created further pressure fueling illegal migration to Northeast India. West

Bengal is another state that is threatened with similar issues of illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal.

It would, therefore, be a denial of reality if one cannot recognise that such disaster was an act of closing the border that spurred the region's domestic issues.

With the basic message being clear, Northeast India, henceforth, can look forward to an economic approach along with new ideas to organise and govern its vast unexplored land by tapping into the existing natural and human

potentials and establishing economic diplomacy and relations with its neighbours, all

through renewed political leadership. The best way is to spur competition, reform the labour market and increase productivity to regain confidence and stability. The new strength of the Northeast economy along with changing and dynamic mercantile trade and the foreign direct investment (FDI) policy with its neighbours may usher a new period here.

The idea of an open transnational economic space with the modern competitive market will not only retrieve the lost economic glory of the region but will also deal with security problems jointly with the

neighbouring nations, as has already been exemplified by Bhutan and now by Bangladesh. Noted economist Kaushik Basu once argued that any changing belief can be right or wrong, but they would have a bigger impact than most people realise. He thinks that any single nation or single policy may not be able to erase the existing

injustices and inequities. Policy-makers must recognise the features (of a region), and to craft a policy, one cannot wish away the rule of the game to court failure, rather it needs to do as much as possible *subject* to the constraints (Basu 2004: 26). As most of Northeast India's neighbouring nations are in transition towards

democracy, it is probably the best time to change its stationary belief and relocate its position with new

strength by opening windows of opportunities with an achievable border management policy and productive economic initiatives with the neighbouring nations.

NOTES

1. The Treaty of Yandaboo is a peace treaty, signed on 24 February 1826 between the East India Company and His Majesty the King of Ava to end the First Anglo-Burmese War. Due to the weak and declining Ahom rule, the Burmese occupation in the territory of Assam in 1821 would cause largescale havoc along with death and destruction for the next three years. As Ahom nobilities finally sought British help to drive the Burmese out from Assam, the dreadful Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1824. After two years, in 1826, the British–Burmese treaty of Yandaboo was signed without the consent of the Ahom king. Assam, without being a part of the treaty, lost its independence and was annexed to the British rule, effectively ending six hundred years' of Ahom monarchy in Assam.
2. The treaty of Sagauli, also known as border treaty, was signed between the East India Company and the King of Nepal on 2 December 1815 and ratified on 4 March 1816 to end the Anglo-

Nepalese War. The treaty called for territorial concessions, where three important aspects were agreed upon:

- (a) Parts of Nepal were to be given to British India. Thus, with the treaty, Nepal lost almost one-third of its territory. Sikkim in the east, Kumaon and Garhwal kingdoms in the west and much of the Terai in the south were lost.
- (b) The establishment of a British representative in Kathmandu.
- (c) Allow Britain to recruit Gurkhas for military service.

Nepal after signing the treaty also lost the right to deploy any American or European employees in its service unlike earlier when many French commanders had been deployed to train the Nepali army.

3. The McMahon Line is a demarcation line drawn on maps agreed as a part of the Simla Accord, a treaty signed by representatives of Britain and Tibet in 1914, and named after the chief British

negotiator, Sir Henry McMahon. It extends for 890 km from Bhutan in the west to 260 km east of the great bend of the River Brahmaputra in the Assam valley, largely along the crest of the Himalayas. Since then it became the

effective boundary between China and India and is regarded by India as the legal international border. China

always disputed its legal status and rejects the Simla Accord, contending that the Tibetan government was not

sovereign and did not have the power to conclude treaties. Thus, despite being present in Simla Conference,

Chinese delegates refused to sign the principal agreement on the status and boundaries of Tibet on the grounds that it was subordinate to China. Since then China has maintained its position and has claimed that Chinese

territory extends southward to the base of the Himalayan foothills including a part of Arunachal Pradesh. China, according to a 1959 diplomatic note by its then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, does recognise the Line of Actual

Control in the eastern part of its border with India.

4. The Radcliffe Line is the demarcation between the Union of India and the Dominion of Pakistan following the Partition of India published on 17 August 1947. It is named after Sir Cyril Radcliffe who chaired both Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commissions. He was in charge of equitable division of 4,50,000 sq. km territory on the basis of 'natural boundaries, communications, watercourses and irrigation systems' to pay heed to socio-political affairs; and 88 million people on the basis of religious demographics to ensure that Muslim majority provinces became part of the new nation of Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh majority provinces remained in India. Bengal province with 54.4 per cent Muslims, was partitioned into East Bengal with Pakistan and West Bengal with India. Thus, population of major religious groups were given their new locations in India and Pakistan, but the Partition unsettled many small tribes, who did not know to which side of the border they belonged. Thus, in the eastern part, small tribes like Garo, Khasi, Jaintia,

Hajon, and many more were split into the borderlands of East Pakistan and Northeast India. Similarly, due to non-representation of Buddhist minority groups, Chittagong Hill Tracts had gone to East Pakistan with the rationale that they were inaccessible to India and also to provide a substantial rural buffer to support Chittagong city and port. The Sylhet district of Assam joined Pakistan in accordance with a referendum, but Karimganj sub-division with a Muslim majority, severed from Sylhet, was given to India. Such 'trysts with destiny' had lingering impacts on the borderland of Northeast India.

5. The historic document *North Eastern Region Vision 2020 Report* was released by former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on 2 July 2008 at New Delhi. It sets the goals, identifies challenges and suggests implementation strategies for various sectors for peace and prosperity in the region, so that, Northeast can take its rightful place in Indian polity and economy. The report in collaboration with Northeastern Council and the National Institute for Public Finance and Policy has been compiled after the mammoth exercise of

interviewing and considering the opinion of 40,000 families of the region. This has been endorsed further by a number of experts, scholars, policy-makers and other stakeholders of the country. The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region aims to translate this document into an actionable working plan. Since then the Northeast has been placed in the development paradigm.

1

Security and Development

Understanding the Relationship

PROBING THE SECURITY–DEVELOPMENT LINKAGE

The contemporary world demands an increasing necessity of linking the concepts of security and development rather than gauging them in isolation, as both terms now are defined in a much broader and multiple ways. Necla Tschirgi (2005) argues that there is a global and systemic opinion that has gradually developed for linking both concepts of security and development, which has gained much greater attention in the aftermath of 9/11 amongst Western scholars and policy-makers. Tschirgi points out several United Nations (UN) reports, which similarly argue that there cannot be any sustained international peace or security without development, and no development without security. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1999) further justifies this connection by saying that development is closely connected to the removal of major sources of ‘unfreedom’, which is rooted in social deprivation and lack of human security. The World Bank, which has pioneered the idea of probing connections between security and development, emphasises both on numerical and theoretical constructs for causes and consequences (Treverton and Klitgaard 2005). Paul Collier and his colleagues from World Bank, thus, have provided new theoretical and empirical understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict in developing countries (Collier and Hoeffler 1998: 563–73; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Collier and Sambanis 2005). Similarly, Robert Holzmann and others also have re-examined development as a function of security. Daniel Kaufmann and his team, on the other hand, have done monumental work in measuring the weaknesses of governments around the world, and recently they have investigated the links between governance, development and

various measures of security (Kaufmann and Kraay 2002; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Kaufmann 2004).

This context, therefore, necessarily demands a greater and deeper attention to conceptualise and redefine the meaning of both these terms (security and development) in the contemporary paradigm. Development is understood as a gradual process of progressive change by which a particular state of affairs is transformed to a better one, widening the scope and range of people's choice. Economic development, thus, can be perceived as continuity from the past unto the present — a transition that takes place along a continuum of ever-changing historical and socio-political ideas and ethos, which reflects in human life. Chasing for a better living in a better world compared to the past transforming the quality of life can, therefore, be a way to define development. Economic development, when defined narrowly as a growth of output and income per se is simply reflected in terms of material progress, which is measurable for a period of time. Such tangible growth, which undoubtedly creates opportunities, can bestow a modern identity to an individual. Neoclassical economists, like Alfred Marshall, as pointed out by David Z. Rich mostly focused growth in terms of creating firm and its production process with respect to profit maximisation. Firm according to Rich is the prime generator of economic activity, creates efficient production throughout the economy, maintains economic development and growth regardless of the phases of its cycle (2010: 17). Such an idea of economic development and growth was perceived by the conventional Western set-up, which grew with the concepts of output growth, capital formation and industrialisation, rightly narrated by economists like Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen as the phenomenon in the world after the Second World War:

Shortly after the Second World War, when development economics emerged as a distinct field of study, the subject had the appearance of being a bastard child of growth economics. Some influence other than growth economics was clearly involved in the origin of development economics, but it was not altogether clear what form this influence had taken. In one respect at least, the offspring did not differ from what could be expected from a genuine 'son of growth economics', namely

an overarching preoccupation with the growth of real income per head (2002: 34).

Such predominant Western ideas of economic development have been dwelled upon for decades together till the time thinkers started raising question about such development in an egalitarian framework. It could be seen vividly that growth per se had no strong mechanism to spill over and diffuse across the different strata of the society. Such material progress is partial and found to be highly inadequate in terms of characterisation, which lacks a pan-welfare proposition. As mentioned by Frances Stewart, though average income still continues to be a fundamental measure of development, yet it fails utterly to have a distributive mechanism across the population and does not cater to the other vital welfare aspects of a society like health, education and security (2004: 2). Therefore, the classical doctrine of development was identified solely by growth lasted till the time of the Second World War, and in the aftermath it has been revised and tested by other set of economic theories to conclude that such dynamism of economic development within the Western capitalist framework is a necessary condition but not sufficient condition for transforming a society to a better space by minimising malaise and discrimination across its citizens. This development is partial and differential. Rising horizontal inequalities, such as development, often lead to social turmoil and violence, which has pushed development theories to be restructured with a 'human face', encountering the facets of disparity and denial. Gradually the core term of economic development, that is 'capital formation', has expanded its horizon, and it was T. W. Schultz (1972) who widened the idea of 'human capital formation' by creating skilled people, through education, health, security and other basic needs. This, to a large extent, found self-sustainability in development paradigm, with better societal ethics and values. Mark Duffield has narrated sustainable development as:

Under the banner of sustainable development, formal development practice embraced a human, and people-centred focus that not only prioritised the development of people ahead of states, it also decoupled human development from any direct or mechanical connection with economic growth. The move towards sustainable development was a

move away from an earlier dominance of state-led modernization strategies based on the primacy of economic growth and assumptions that the underdeveloped world would, after passing through various stages, eventually resemble the developed. Rather than economic growth *per se*, a broader approach to development emerged based on aggregate improvement in health, education, employment and social inclusion as an essential precursor for the realization of market opportunities (2005: 6).

Arguments started evolving that a society can very well claim to achieve development by eliminating or minimising all forms of human insecurity, such as poverty, hunger, social deprivation, discrimination, and economic inequality. Gradually such wider connotation of the term development started incorporating the concept of human security, where both converge to the idea that ‘people are the real wealth of a Nation’. Since then a new journey began; and the approach towards ‘human development’, which was envisioned more than 20 years ago, in 1990, by two pioneering thinkers Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen have been manifested today in the 20-yearly Human Development reports of the UNDP to assess the development discourse across the world. As mentioned by Ian Little, even classical scholars like Smith and Mill saw other real opportunities with income as an ability to lead a better life (Little 1977: 222). Thus, development started valuing human well-being, which can no longer be identified with rising income; rather it is an inclusive development where progress is better identified with human capital, opportunities and human development. Such an evolving idea found a concrete shape in February 2008, when the President of the French Republic, Nicholas Sarkozy wanted an alternative model of GDP to evaluate the well-being of the economy and society. Thus, the ‘The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress’ (CMEPSP) was formed, which aimed at identifying the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress, including the problems with its measurement. The Commission also aimed to consider what additional information might be required for having more relevant indicators of social progress, to assess the feasibility of alternative measurement tools, and to discuss how to present the statistical information in an appropriate way. Such a Commission was headed by scholars like

Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean Paul Fitoussi. Since then continuous attempts have been going on in several fora to construct a better model for development. Joseph Stiglitz, who now criticises GDP measures, is of the opinion that,

GDP measures the busy-ness of our economy. But the big question is whether we are busy doing the right things. Making your economy grow more will not necessarily get you the things that people really want. Our pre-occupation with GDP makes it difficult for politicians to back policies that are good for society and for the environment but which might not result in an increase in GDP (OECD 2012).

Stiglitz is of the view that the world is paying a very high price for inequality. It has weakened economy, undermined democracy and divided society. Such adverse impact may not be adequately reflected in the conventional GDP measure. Thus, quality of life must be a democratic concept and not the quality of life as policy-makers may define it (ibid., 2012). Such an inclusive view of development has also found a unique dimension in Amartya Sen's exemplary theory of capability approach. He emphasises development needs to be gauged by a process of expanding real freedom that the citizens enjoy for pursuing the objectives they have the reason to value, and in this sense the expansion of human capabilities can broadly be seen as the central feature of the process of development. This capability approach to choose, through the functioning of beings and doings, as Sen argues, should be measurable, observable, and comparable (Sen 2002: 35). Such redefined concept of development, which encourages expansion of both freedom and capabilities of citizens, underlies an intrinsic relationship with the term security of the contemporary era.

The concept of security, on the other hand, for a long period even after the Second World War has been coined with State-centric and State-based issues. The State played a dominant role to evolve the issues of security, concerning both realist and idealist views. Thus, the issues of balancing international power, as the realists perceived and creating a scope for co-operation, as the idealists pushed forward worked simultaneously for a prolonged period of time. Peace, stability and harmony of people were the areas which were largely dominated and handled by the state. But since the

1970s, the concept of security made a shift towards resource concerns of the world (due to various factors, such as oil shock among others) and its related conflicts and management, and then gradually the dynamics and scope of security started getting broadened and comprehensive with the idea of inducing many more components which are directly related to human welfare and human needs. Taking the example of Asian security, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever state that, Asia still shows traditional regional security dynamics, which is framed largely in military-political mode. The popularity of comprehensive and co-operative security rhetoric in many Asian states has emerged as a significant development, mostly in Southeast Asia, where ASEAN constructed a noteworthy third world security regime (Buzan and Waever 2003: 93). On the other hand citing the scenario of Asian states, Muthiah Alagappa takes the view, 'security through development' as a commonly accepted principle:

economic security is the key element in augmenting national power, prestige, and influence and as a prerequisite for the development and sustenance of diplomatic and military power; as enabling governments to discharge their welfare function; as a critical resource for political and social stability and for enhancing national resilience (Alagappa 1998: 626–27).

While looking for common factors in both security and development in the modern world, one can say that the term security has emerged, evolved and now commonly understood as a state of being free from danger or injury; on the other hand, the term development, as defined in contemporary literature, is a process of improvements in human condition. Therefore, both terms share a common denomination of improving a state of living, and are essential for one another. Tschirgi rightly points out the necessity of linking security and development in the policy forum also, and adopting a global/systemic view of the linkage between these two terms (2005: 4). Frances Stewart is also of the opinion that security in the present context needs to be an explicit component of development (2004: 3). People may have the capability to perform many things, yet these capabilities may be cut off, or people's sense of well-being may be adversely affected due to high degree of insecurity. Such insecurity may have the range of the possibility of

economic volatilities, health crisis, criminal actions or political violence. If these events are widespread, they can have serious adverse impacts on the lives of people and eventually on overall development. Thus, individual as well as community security are important dimensions of development. Their absence, as Stewart feels, seriously detracts from development, even if other aspects of development are made. Thus, economic activities and security issues represent the two most basic concerns of modern development discourse; one is concerned with the gaining and production of values while the other is concerned with the prevention of their losses. Both these issues are closely interlinked even in the perspective of transnational connectivity and human mobility. One can no longer discuss economic prosperity and security perception in mutually exclusive paradigms. This inter-relationship between security and development has grown in profile since the early 1990s, as donors and development practitioners have understood that it is impractical to consider development without taking security and conflict issues into account and the international security actors have realised that their short-term operations will not bring sustainable benefits without co-ordination with longer-term development work.

Probing such inter-linkage has spontaneously widened the scope of both the terms across the nations. In the Asian context, Alagappa shows the evolution of the phrase 'comprehensive security' since it was first coined in Japan in the 1980s and widely used in ASEAN states thereafter (1998: 624–25). Comprehensive security goes beyond military security and embraces political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Eventually other Asian giants like China also has started emphasising economic development and technology in the belief that national security depends on nation's overall strength, not simply its military might. In case of the Indian subcontinent, both territorial security through military interjections due to neighbourhood volatility, and human security due to mass scale poverty and human deprivation have aroused the increasing necessity of linking security and development. Max. G. Manwaring's argument, therefore, follows the logic that

security can no longer be considered only in terms of protecting national territory and interests against external military aggressions. Rather, security is being re-defined more broadly to encompass

stability; stability is depending on the legitimate political, economic and social development, well-being of the global community (1998).

SECURITY–DEVELOPMENT CONVERGENCE: HUMANE PHASE

It is gradually understood that the referent object of both development and security has shifted from the objective study of income growth and military empowerment to the subjective study of the human being — who plays the pivotal role in the evolution of both development and security studies. Thus, both development and security, which speak widely about distributive mechanism, social justice, capability approach, and human security, are comprehensive concepts, engaging all political, economic, socio-cultural, and strategic dimensions, aimed at improving the welfare of human beings. While attempting at a functional relationship between human development and human security, it can be argued that though one cannot be equated to other, human development is dependent on human security to widen the range of people's free choices (*Human Development Report* 1994: 23). UNDP's *Human Development Report* centralises the argument that human development is a process of widening the range of people's choices and, on the other hand, human security ensures that people exercise these choices safely and freely, and they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow (*Human Development Report* 1994: 23). Ogata and Sen also reiterates and mentions that 'human security is concerned with reducing and when possible removing the insecurities that plague human lives' (2003: 159). Human security, therefore, provides a space and opportunities to human beings to meet their most essential needs and earn their own living. The UNDP had initiated this concept of human security in 1994 and attributed two major components to it: (a) freedom from war and (b) freedom from want.

The concept of security has made a transition from state-centric issues to people-centric issues in two basic ways:

- (a) From an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security.
- (b) From security through armaments to security through sustainable development.

The report of the Secretary to the United Nations General Assembly on 21 March 2005 later very clearly narrated that,

In the twenty-first century, all States and their collective institutions must advance the cause of larger freedom — by ensuring freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity. In an increasingly interconnected world, progress in the areas of development, security and human rights must go hand in hand. There will be no development without security and no security without development. And both development and security also depend on respect for human rights and the rule of law (Tschirgi 2005).

The broader concept of security is now inclined more to development issues than to strategic issues, which reiterates the importance of clustering development and security in one framework, where human being is the pivotal variable (Multimer 1999: 83). Thus, as argued by Ramesh Thakur, ‘the fundamental components of human security — the security of people against threats to life, health, livelihood, personal safety and human dignity can be put at risk by external aggression, and also by factors within a country including “security” forces’ (2001: 180). The traditional narrow concept of security, further argued by Thakur, leaves out the most fundamental concerns of human beings, such as poverty, disease, shelter, employment, crime, and conflicts, and diverts away a huge amount of national and human resources for armed forces and armaments. Thus, human security is a much broader concept, which can meet the challenges of ‘real world circumstances’ (ibid.: 182). Thakur, therefore, explicitly argues that ‘once security is defined as human security, security policy embraces the totality of state responsibilities for the welfare of citizens from the cradle to the grave’ (ibid.: 183).

Conflicts and deprivation are interconnected. Deprivation has many causal links to violence, although these have to be carefully examined. Conversely wars kill people, destroy trust among them, increase poverty and crime and slow down the economy. To address such insecurities effectively, an integrated approach is essential (Ogata and Sen 2003), and the UNDP report rightly points out that

there is of course, a link between human security and human development: progress in one area enhances the chances of progress in the other. But failure in one area also heightens the risk of failure in the other, and history is replete with examples (*Human Development Report* 1994: 23).

Human security gradually, therefore, emerged, reshaped and was popularised in the post-Cold War security scenario. It now addresses the world in which the threat of catastrophic nuclear war between leading states has been replaced by a concern for the well-being of people living within ineffective ones. Thus, people's ability to enjoy safe, complete and fulfilled lives — their human security — has moved from the shadows of domestic affairs onto the international political agenda (Duffield 2005: p1). In this universalistic notion of human security, Duffield has argued that development and security are regarded as 'different but equal', and the various issues, such as war on terrorism, has actually deepened this interconnectivity of development and security (2005: p1). Thus, as human security is converging more towards development discourse, its definition also is becoming more and more explicit. The Commission of Human Security redefines it as:

Human security in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care, and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her own potential ... Freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of the future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human, therefore national security (Ogata and Sen 2003: 4).

Barry Buzan, on the other hand, has made a sectoral approach to security, and argues that military security is just one of five forms of threat the state could face. He argues that

The security of human collectivities is affected by factors in five major sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. Generally speaking, military security concerns the two-level interplay

of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and states' perceptions of each other's intentions. Political security concerns the organisational stability of states, system of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. Economic security concerns access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Societal security concerns the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom. Environmental security concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend. These five sectors do not operate in isolation from each other. Each defines a focal point within the security problematique, and a way of operating priorities, but all are woven together in a strong web of linkages (1991: 19–20).

With such broader concepts of security, its perception has now become much more relevant in this flat world, which has revealed a changing economic, political and social world order, and accepting the many new and multi-dimensional realities of conflicts, threats and challenges. Thus, the relevance of security has gradually extended beyond strategy to various such disciplines of social science and all these facets of security are pivotal for development. For example, Frances Stewart says that lack of human security has adverse consequences on economic growth and poverty and thereby on development, and lack of development adds to a sharp horizontal inequality, which is an important cause of conflict (2004: 18–19). The UNDP, in its *Human Development Report* (1994) has conceptualised the idea of human security by categorising its threat under seven heads:

- (a) Economic Security
- (b) Food Security
- (c) Health Security
- (d) Environmental Security
- (e) Personal Security
- (f) Community Security
- (g) Political Security

All these important aspects of human security directly affect the well-being and dignity of human life. If such revolutionary ideas of human security are translated into reality across the world, it can usher in a coherent and harmonious world in the 21st century (ibid. 1994: 22–23). Thus,

- (a) Human security is a universal concern, cutting across the borders of rich and poor nations with issues, such as unemployment, drugs, crime, environment, and/or violation of human rights.
- (b) These components of human security are interdependent and cannot be seen in isolation.
- (c) Human security is easier to ensure through early prevention and intervention. So an appropriate vision and policy can save and then can improve the quality of life.
- (d) Human security is people-centered. It is concerned with people's well-being, their freedom and social opportunities.

Having such transitions in the term security, development thinkers possibly find all reasons now to study its discourses along security in the same direction. After all, human development also deals with three fundamental components of human needs, that is, income, education and health. Denial of these brings sharp development differentials, which ignites conflicts and violence in a society. Therefore, nations that are affected sharply by conflicts and terrorism, mostly the developing nations, such as the Indian subcontinent, need a better understanding of both these terms security and development, and their importance of inter-connectivity. India's threats to various insurgency operations, terrorism, separatism, and left-wing extremism across its several parts, therefore, need a deep analysis on security and development and their possible linkages with justice and reconciliation. Neither of these issues can be considered in isolation to correlate the roots of these problems. In this context, a revisit to the decades old problems of security threats that have plagued one of India's borderlands, the Northeast remains meaningful. A fresh approach for probing connectivity between both security and development in this borderland might provide a sustainable solution to such decades' old unresolved puzzles.

NORTHEAST INDIA: A PRISM THROUGH THE SECURITY–DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

No problem in this contemporary world probably can be examined in isolation; rather, it needs to be contextualised in the emerging new realities and threats that are now set in with the concepts of transnationalism and globalism, which have entailed at both global and regional levels. These include diverse socio-political, ecological and economic issues such as cross-border terrorism, cross-border illegal migration and trade, dysfunctional governance, climatic change, health crisis, economic imbalances, and so on (Schwab 2006: 13). India's challenge to such issues in the aftermath of globalism is no less grave. On one hand, it has substantially achieved economic development and global recognition, and on the other hand, it has become one of the hot spots in South Asia for terror strikes and security sensitivity. Since the country is surrounded by several volatile neighbours, it is badly hit and exposed to various security threats, with its frontier regions remaining even more sensitive. So despite being a major player in Asia and even in the world due to its geo-strategic location, the size of the population, its large and growing economy, its indigenous technological capability, and its army, which is fourth largest in the world (Bajpai 1998: 157), it continues to be threatened by several security issues at length, both across its borders and within the country. It, therefore, demands attention in both the fronts of trans-national and internal security assessment.

The vision of taking India into 21st century through liberalisation and through structural economic reform measures in 1991 has opened up its economic possibilities immensely, but such attempts have remained highly asymmetrical. Such liberal economic policies has broadened the scope for a section of the skilled population, and uplifted their living standards but left aside the masses. This has divided India much sharply than before amongst its population, regions and sectors, which is more due to the improper 'trickle down' mechanism of such development discourse. As a result this fast growing country, which achieved nearly 8 per cent GDP growth rates in the last decade, shamefully ranks 134 amongst 177 nations in the human development index (HDI) of the UNDP. A quarter of its population still lives below the poverty threshold, more than 30 per cent of its population is yet to read and write, it has the biggest number of malnourished children in the

world, and its common citizens have remained poor victims of terrorism and other conflicts. Such a sharp division of prosperity and poverty in the Indian society and such widening horizontal inequalities across several groups and regions is slowly creating various social disharmonies, economic marginalisation and has led to the challenges to human security. These threats are perceived more in some regions in India than others. The borderland states of the Northeastern region, most of which are small states, except Assam, are known for their perpetual disturbance and vulnerability due to territorial security risks, terror strife, market denial, and severe economic non-viability. Most of the Northeastern states have witnessed an increase in poverty ratio with Manipur having 47.1 per cent of its population below the poverty line (Planning Commission 2012). Within the region, the states, which have been created on the basis of identity issues, are economically weak, politically unstable and are the victims of bad governance. The conceivable threats that the whole region confronts with are poor infrastructural base, economic, industrial and technological deficiencies, administrative loopholes, opportunity deficiencies, managerial inexperience, and, above all, a lack of strong political representation. Such lack of overall development and modernisation has, to a large extent, exposed the region to vulnerable human security, already a severe victim of territorial insecurity with various sensitive cross-border activities, borders it shares with five nations. The Red corridor in India, which is another affected region by left-wing extremism, is the other glaring example of utter negligence in development for a prolonged period of time at that extended region, which cuts across many states and districts of India. As rightly argued by K. Subrahmanyam, national security goes beyond the threats of our territorial integrity and sovereignty and it encompasses economic development plans and communal harmony (Bajpai 1998: 164). Ever since Independence, India has held to the vision that economic development is a key to security value. It is believed that an economically backward India could be the prey to external and internal foes and the economic weakness would hurt its defense, keep it technologically backward and promote internal instability. The country's enemies, both external and internal, would find fertile soil for subversion. Thus, it has given emphasis on economic security of the country (Bajpai 1998: 186). But after more than six decades of such policy, it can be seen that such a policy of economic development

has not met the needs of millions, and human security for these millions has remained a distant dream. Such lopsided development, therefore, has brought in many conflicts across the country, added with serious violence and terrorisms. Various violent groups, who have been fighting for their basic rights, have already made connection with many neighbouring nations for support and strength. A time, therefore, has come to rethink about such policy emphasis on the economic development in the country. While looking further at the nexus of security-development-security, Frances Stewart points out a vicious cycle of lack of development leading to conflict leading to further lack of development, the scenario which can readily emerge. Conversely the virtuous cycle should also be possible with high levels of security leading to development and development further promoting security. But this virtuous cycle can be readily broken because it is easy to have relatively high level of security without necessarily experiencing economic growth, or to have high security and economic growth, but not inclusive growth so the potential for conflict remains (Stewart 2004). This second category of non-inclusive growth as mentioned by Frances Stewart is visible in many Asian nations including India. Mark Duffield has further made a 'fusion of development and security', which conceptually nullifies the defensive attitude that reflects through its prolonged territorial and military security. Rather this being an integrative concept, it acknowledges the universalism of life and solidarity amongst people (2005: 3). A balance development along with emphasis on internal security is the need of the hour now. Also attempts need to be made at probing for an integrated approach between development and security in Indian context, so that this multi-ethnic and diverse country can sustain in the long run.

Northeast India, due to its geostrategic location, is being challenged with several non-traditional, territorial and human security threats. As pointed out by one of the UNDP reports, 'failed or limited human development leads to a backlog of human deprivation — poverty, hunger, disease or persisting disparities between ethnic communities or between regions. This backlog in access to power and economic opportunities can lead to violence' (*Human Development Report* 1994: 23) Therefore, when people perceive threats to their immediate security, they tend to become less tolerant. Also, when the basis of livelihood is eroded, political conflicts can be ensured. Oppression and perception of injustice can prompt violence against authoritarianism

(ibid.). In connection to India's Northeast, it can be said that this region, which has remained one of the least developed since Independence, has reflected as the most problematic region in India in terms of its various internal unresolved issues and thus has confronted with several conflicts over time. B. B. Kumar argues that this region in India has been suffering from economic backwardness on one hand, and the acute problem of internal and external security issues on the other. Till today, it is of the least understood parts of the country, but is the most densely administered part of India (Kumar 2005: 124–25). Despite having several state-driven security and administrative machineries, the region has been failing to ensure peace and stability. For a very long period, insurgency operations have remained strong pull factors for its economic revival. Persistent violence in the region such as blasts, *bandhs*, blockades, terror strikes repeatedly remind us that this terror-stricken Northeast region is hijacked by security issues rather the development issues. Several government policies on development strategy have failed to work here primarily due to such security risks and xenophobia. Some of the core issues with which the region is plugged for so many decades have been rightly identified by Sinha (2005) as issues of identity, migration and economic underdevelopment, briefly narrated in the subsequent sections for an understanding of the region (ibid.: 21–25).

IDENTITY

The issue of ethnicity and identity has remained the most predominant factor in the Northeast region since Independence, which is shared by more than 200 diverse ethnic groups. Strong ethnic distinctions, their cross-border linkages naturally creating space for sensitivity and aspiration for distinct identities, thus reflected various intra-ethnic rivalry and conflicts. Such an issue for a long time had submerged other genuine development issues of the region, such as human poverty, lack of physical connectivity, low economic performance, and high unemployment. These relatively smaller ethnic groups in the region have seen both the processes of fragmentation and consolidation of the smaller entities into the larger ones and larger socio-cultural units. Such different levels of ethnic aspirations and demands for political visibility have remained an unresolved puzzle in the region over time. To understand deeply such context of multiethnic identity issue of

Northeast India, one needs a comparison with other such contexts. Amongst many nations, Israel can be another such multi-ethnic state of the world, where a similar issue is evolving strongly for their identity formation. Baruch Kimmerling argues in the context of Israel that identity is the core that tends to persist in the country even when the government or the state's regime changes. It is only a matter of convenience, as he mentions rightly, that each state has its own name, banner, symbols, and anthem (Kimmerling 2008: 106–7). Kimmerling brings in the puzzle of what makes the French state French and the Swiss state Swiss, which is actually a much more fundamental concept. The collective identity determines not only the collectivity's geographical and societal boundaries, basic credo, political culture, civic religion, and civil society, but also the rules of the game, stated or unstated — in short, the state's logic, which remain unaffected by changes of government, administration or regimes. He is of the opinion that the logics are imposed by geopolitical constraints rooted in the human and material resources that the state possesses — its identity and political culture — and are carried out mainly through state's bureaucracy and other state agencies that represent their own and their class interests. In Northeast India also, where several ethnic communities have lived for centuries, her ethnic identity formation therefore has evolved in historical perspective and in its geopolitical construct, which changed its discourse since the time of British colonials and their administrative machineries. Such external administrative machinery had eventually strengthened the root to their identity awareness having political space, which was manifested since India's Independence in various forms, explained in many ways along with many unending struggles and movements. Scholars like Mrinal Miri, for example, bring out two broad views of Northeast India's ethnic identity issue. They are the views from inside and views from outside the region. The outsiders' view, he argues, is of the Northeast as a unitary entity, inhabited by vaguely differentiated 'tribal' people, coined by the British ethnographers, who seem 'racially distinct' from Indians elsewhere. And the insiders' diverse views cater to tribes, communities, languages, ethnicity, culture, tradition, etc. Miri has termed the insiders' view as 'egocentric predicament'. Such egocentricity amongst insiders and misnomers amongst the outsiders have invited several conflicts over time (Miri 2007: 3). Having such complex ethnic conglomeration, which also has cross-border connections and sustains to a

large extent with cross-border support from similar ethnic groups, the region can no longer be understood and discussed without having the focus of identity issues of its people. Such persistent identity conflicts have resulted in several violent activities, which in turn have triggered security sensitivity in the region. Thus, in Northeast India, the issues of ethnicity, violence and security are highly correlated, which in turn have affected its development extensively. Each of such inter-ethnic conflicts has led to problems of displacement, disparity and degradation. For example, in recent times, the intra-ethnic conflict between the two communities of Rava from Assam and Garo from Meghalaya in the border area of Assam–Meghalaya has rendered around 50,000 people homeless and displaced and has created again a situation of security threat in the region. There are many such instances of ethnic violence in this region, and an estimate shows that during the post-Independence period, over 800,000 people were displaced so far in the region, covering all its states (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Report 2011: 9). If this number is added to the most recent figures of displacement, which tends to be around 400,000 people due to the conflict between the Bodo ethnic community and the immigrant community of Bangladesh in the western part of Assam (in 2012), then the number rises up to a staggering 1,200,000, approximately.

Such ethnic conflicts in Northeast India, therefore, have strong connections across the border. Several ethnic communities in this region still have their roots and connections across the border of Myanmar, Southwest China, Nepal, and Bangladesh, who were separated during the British rule and its conscious efforts of re-drawing the boundary in the region for their own strategic interest. Many ethnic groups at that time lost their organic natural links, and gradually have developed cross-border underground connections to fight for their rights by challenging the Indian state and aggravating the region's security scenario. Thus, as rightly argued by P. C. Dutta in this part of India, ethnicity and security have remained closely connected issues, and security threats in this region is primarily an outcome and manifestation of several such ethnic insurgent groups and their activities (Dutta 2005: 97–98). For the last several decades, the region has witnessed various such ethnic movements, which have affected and destroyed many of its economic development initiatives to a large extent. Muthiah Alagappa's argument, therefore, rightly fits here, when he said that the grievances over

distributive justice can be fuelled from groups like ethnic, religious and caste and can challenge the security. These can be uncontrolled forces, when they are fed with political identity and legitimacy. Also less developed regions remain more fertile ground for separatist movements challenging the legitimacy of incumbent governments on the basis of competing ideologies and promises of better performance. There it is ideal to see why, how and when such issues of group differentiation occurs what alienations and resentments trigger and can sustain ethnic tensions, and on what conditions they lead to violent conflicts (Alagappa 1998: 37).

MIGRATION

Migration is another phenomenon with which the region is challenged for last several decades. The region interestingly has evolved with migration history, where during the pre-colonial era, such migration and movement of people from the bordering nations was a natural phenomenon, which resulted in both cultural and economic assimilation. But the same story of migration has evolved in a different context during colonial era, where people were forcefully brought in from outside and from neighbouring states for serving the economic interests of the British across this region. Migrant labourers were mostly used for certain economic sectors, such as tea estates, which eventually created enclaves of prosperity for the British, the share of which was not spilt-over across the region. During this period, as borders were demarcated, Northeast India's natural links with countries such as Burma, Southwest China and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) were disrupted. This continued even in the post-colonial era, where some such border routes became the source of illegal immigration. Immediately after Independence, the migration story was placed in the context of refugees from a neighbouring country (such as East Pakistan) in this frontier region, which dramatically reshaped the existing demography. The issue continues even today as cross-border illegal migration (in the aftermath of 1971) affects the country, pressuring its economy and demography. The demographic composition of such migrant population is changing fast within the region. Thus, the flow of Bengali Hindu refugees, post-Independence, from East Pakistan, is gradually being replaced by the flow of illegal Bengali-Muslim migrants, post-1971, from Bangladesh, who desperately

cross the border in search of a better life and livelihood. Such a long history of migration has affected the region from a multi-dimensional perspective, with periodical violence between the ethnic and immigrant communities grossly impacting both development and security aspects. The other neighbouring state West Bengal also has become the similar victim of migration and infiltration issue from its international neighbours like Bangladesh and Nepal. It has been estimated that in West Bengal around 2,200 illegal immigrants cross the border from Bangladesh every day, leaving aside Assam and other Northeastern states (*Hindustan Times* 2008). Muthiah Alagappa while discussing about the non-traditional dimensions of security in Asia argues that

large-scale migration, drugs, and cultural imperialism are among the socio-cultural issues that have been cited as threats to security. Large scale migration — the estimated two to six million Bangladeshis in the northeastern states of India, for example, or the presence of some half a million Filipinos in Sabah (Malaysia) — is of concern because of its perceived negative impact on the cultural and political identity of the receiving people and by extension of their control of political power (1998: 627).

He further shows that largescale migration imposes social and economic burden and sows seeds of tension and conflicts between the ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries. Thus, in case of Northeast India, such flow of migration has mainly generated negative impacts in terms of demographic imbalance, undue economic pressure and excessive security threats. As argued by B. B. Datta,

In post-Independent India the vast demographic change with the consequences of partition ceaselessly at work, a grave security challenge to the civilisation is fast developing. In the areas covered by North Eastern and Eastern region states, the threat is much more acute with the growing immigrant population. It has created social unrest and political turmoil (2005: 35).

Such an issue of migration has become a perpetual phenomenon in this region, which has been constantly reconfiguring its demographic landscapes,

and creating pressure on economy and enhancing the consciousness of the indigenous people for their land and economic rights.

ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Economic underdevelopment is another crucial issue of this region, which to a large extent explains the existing isolation and peripheral nature of Northeast India, the root of which lies in British Raj, who came and conquered the region and used this land for their vested interests. They explored the vast economic possibilities of this region through both production and trade possibilities with neighbouring nations, and never thought of the development and growth of this land and its indigenous people. The people of the region were deliberately kept isolated from economic activities of colonials as skilled migrant labourers were used to explore the land. On the other hand, trade routes were formed according to their convenience and with their own products. This has affected local traditional trade and has impoverished the region. Creation of East Pakistan as the final trump card of British rulers during India's independence in 1947 and eventual liberation of it as Bangladesh in 1971 has vastly isolated and truncated various existing economic openings of Northeast region of India. Northeast was relocated as a strategic land with Bangladesh as new neighbouring nation along with Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and Southwest China. Region's economic development was utterly neglected for long period of time, reflecting acute underdevelopment in region's overall economic performance, infrastructural index, investment scenario, and sheer lack of connectivity. Issues of militancy and prolonged cross border illegal activities have made the development scenario of the region even worse. Thus, amongst various indicators, the contemporary poverty scenario in the region reflects with an increase of 10 per cent in Head Count Ratio, as estimated by the Planning Commission of India for the year 2009–10. Within the region some states have performed worse than others, and states such as Assam (37.9 per cent) and Manipur (47.1 per cent) top the list in poverty ratio, which are much higher than national average (29.8 per cent) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (25.9 per cent). Whereas Mizoram (21.1 per cent), Nagaland (20.9 per cent), Meghalaya (17.1 per cent), Tripura (17.4 per cent) and Sikkim (13.1 per cent) on the other hand have lower poverty ratios than

national average. (Planning Commission 2012). Similarly in terms of Per Capita Income, Sikkim tops the list with INR 75,137 followed by Tripura with INR 42,481, which are above the national level (INR 39,168). States like Assam with INR 37,690, Manipur with INR 25,205 and Arunachal Pradesh with INR 24,198 are much below the national average.¹

Thus, over time few states could exhibit better performance, primarily due to better governance and political leadership, which has led to a divide between relatively stable-progressive states and highly disturbed-backward states within the region. States such as Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura are in the first category, performing much better than states such as Manipur, Assam and Nagaland. In very recent times, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have started performing better and their economic indicators have also improved. Amongst all eight states, Sikkim now tops the list in terms of overall socio-economic index, where its present Chief Minister Mr Pawan Chamling has been selected for the fifth term. Tripura is another state which is on the path of economic development, where also the Chief Minister Manik Sarkar is leading the state for the fourth consecutive term. Political stability has provided some scope for these states to perform better, while others are still fighting with multi-dimensional development problems, which in turn aggravate the internal security scenario with more conflicts and violence.

Therefore, according to Alagappa, economic strength has always been considered as an important component of national power and security. Development and sustenance of military power and also the state policy depend largely on their economic health and ranking (Alagappa 1998: 45). He further mentions that in response to the multidimensional nature of the problems of identity, legitimacy, and socioeconomic grievances, Asia's central decision makers deploy a wide array of measures — political, legal, economic, socio-cultural and military — to cope with internal security challenges (ibid.: 629). India's Northeast has already reflected with such weak economic performance, which has remained one of the most important factor of aggravating anger and internal insecurity in the region.

As both underdevelopment and conflicts have remained perpetually and visibly connected in this region, the idea of probing such inter-linkages more deeply between both development and security has become important now. Such close inter-connectivity as reflected in Northeast India is not a unique

phenomenon, but has already been observed in many other nations by scholars over time. As Frances Stewart has observed and studied such development costs of insecurity and economic behavior for 25 countries, which are worst affected by conflicts. Stewart has taken the period of 1960 to 1995 and found some common consequences on economic development during conflicts, which are as follows (2004: 5):

- (a) Economic growth remains affected.
- (b) Trade sector gets badly affected.
- (c) There occurs a tendency to make a sectoral shift towards subsistence, informal activities and simple manufacturing production sectors during conflicts.
- (d) Propensity to consume declines due to a fall in per capita GDP.
- (e) Government revenues as a share of GDP tend to decline.
- (f) During conflicts, the share of government expenditure for defence sector inevitably rises, and the share for social sector declines. Thus, they become inversely related.
- (g) There are huge development costs due to destruction and devastation after conflicts.

It is evident that development is fundamental to every nation, which can ensure human security, and without which there can be various levels of conflicts. It is also obvious now that human security cannot be ensured through force, by making a trade-off with economy, as has been happening in Northeast India for decades together. Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has become the rule of law in the region for last more than five decades. Under AFSPA of 1958, the Indian army had received extended powers in the region to shoot, arrest and search, all in the name of aiding civil power. It was initially applied to the Northeastern states of Assam and Manipur and was amended in 1972 to extend to all the seven states. Under this Act, security forces were given unrestricted and unaccounted power to carry out their operations, once an area was declared as disturbed. Even a non-commissioned officer was granted the right to shoot and kill, based on mere suspicion that it was necessary to do so in order to maintain public order. AFSPA in the region has continued since then though many of the security problems of the region could have been tackled by the local police

along with the assistance of the armed forces, where essential. Northeast India eventually became a big challenge for the Indian administration on strategic and internal security issues. These acted as impediments for the region's development (Bhattacharya 2011: 197–212). Scholars such as Verghese, on the other hand, believe that the turmoil in Northeast India is only a minor hurdle, having a politics of nascent nationality formation among awakening tribes and groups, who are threatened by demographic and political changes. Therefore, a combination of development and nation-building would put an end to such turmoil and conflicts (Verghese 1996: xi–xii). His argument indeed reiterates the importance of development. But each of these core issues of Northeast India needs to be contextualised across its border and bordering nations, as they have deep rooted connection. The redrawing of borders during British administration has made Northeast India a unique region, which had inherited many problems in the subsequent years. Persistent cross-border activities have triggered conflicts, insecurity and underdevelopment here adding more damage than other. So the thrust of the argument needs to evolve around the hypothesis that the region's international neighbours with which it shares long porous border are to a substantial extent responsible for its persistent internal security threats and acute under-development. Referring to Alagappa's argument that some internal conflicts have significant international ramifications and fuse with international conflicts, blurring the distinction between domestic and international politics, it can be said that even in Northeast India, it is difficult to make any binary distinction between national and international spaces as the region is deeply connected to all her neighbouring nations. Alagappa points out that the term *failed states* have been coined to describe such states, where security problems are transpired through conflicts and violence, which may not be always for their own people but also for neighbouring states. Thus, treating the state as a unitary actor and domestic realm as one authority, law and order and the policy frames close off these crucial dimensions of international factors cannot exhaustively explain the situations of internal conflicts, especially in borderland areas (Alagappa 1998: 35). Therefore, borderlands like Northeast India, which is uniquely positioned with five neighbouring nations need to be relocated and revisited in a trans-national space to purposefully understand the unresolved problems of security threats and underdevelopment.

RELOCATING NORTHEAST INDIA

Creating a hypothesis that Northeast India's international neighbours are substantially responsible for its internal security threats and underdevelopment, the region henceforth in this book would be contextualised in a wider trans-regional space. For this it is necessary to understand the economy, polity and society of the neighbouring nations to find the common and contrast scenarios with Northeast India. This would help to understand the cross-border threats and their impacts on region's security and development. Bordering nations such as Southwest China, Northwest Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, which have been either economically underdeveloped, politically volatile or socially unstable have remained highly potential sources to destabilise India's Northeast through most visible issues like illegal migration, drug trafficking, militancy, illegal trade and other interjections.

Table 1.1 Trend of HDI between India and its Eastern Neighbours (Value and Rank)

<i>Year</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Nepal</i>	<i>Bhutan</i>
1980	0.344	0.404	0.303	0.279	0.242	–
1990	0.410	0.490	0.352	0.298	0.340	–
2000	0.461	0.588	0.422	0.380	0.398	0.494
2005	0.504	0.633	0.462	0.436	0.424	–
2009	0.535	0.674	0.491	0.474	0.449	–
2010	0.542	0.682	0.496	0.479	0.455	0.518
2011	0.547	0.687	0.500	0.483	0.458	0.522
	(134)	(101)	(146)	(151)	(157)	(141)

Source: Human Development Report 2011.

Note: Figures in the parenthesis are the ranks of HDI.

Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4, therefore, briefly have discussed the socio-economic scenario of India vis-à-vis its neighbouring nations. While

comparing the trend of HDI of these nations, it can be seen that except China, all other countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar have a lower HDI than India, though the values have improved for all these nations over time. Nepal has performed worst followed by Myanmar and then Bangladesh. China tops the list. Both China and India are in the medium development index group, while rest three nations are in low development index group of UNDP. Comparing this scenario with Northeast India, it can be said that some of the states in the region are performing better than national average as well as its neighbouring nations. The performance in education and health is better in the region than India and some of region's neighbouring nations. Thus, in 1980, Manipur had HDI 0.461, which is higher than India as well as its neighbours, except China. And in 1990, state like Mizoram topped the list with HDI 0.548, barring China in the list, while in 2001, Tripura's HDI was 0.590, again higher than all the bordering nations and national average of India, except China. Similarly, the HDI in Arunachal Pradesh in 2001 was 0.515, much higher than any of these except China. Nagaland in 2002 had 0.705, which is even higher than China. Sikkim in 2001 had the value as 0.590, again higher than even China. Assam was the only state which had a low index as 0.407 in 2001 (Planning Commission, various state reports).

While looking at the three different components of HDI in Table 1.2, it can be seen that the life expectancy is lowest in Myanmar in both the years like 2000 and 2010, whereas for China, it is the highest followed by India. The other two nations show higher life expectancy in the year 2010 than India. In the case of adult literacy rate, one finds interestingly that Myanmar is almost at par with China in both the years, and is much higher than India and other neighbours. Bangladesh and Nepal have done very badly with adult literacy rates, though India's scenario is also not encouraging. While in case of enrolment ratio, one finds that except China, other four nations are much below India's average. Looking at the per capita gross domestic product, one again finds that India is between China and rest of its Eastern neighbours. Bangladesh has improved marginally from the year 2000 to 2010, while Nepal's per capita income has gone down. China, of course, has doubled her average income with its fast growing economy and India has also improved but not at the rate of China's growth.

It is also interesting to look at the demographic profile of these nations along with India. Both India and China share one-third of the world's population (see Table 1.3). India's Eastern neighbours comparatively have thin population with Bangladesh sharing 13.25 per cent of India's population followed by Myanmar 4.55 per cent and Nepal 2.29 per cent. Urban population pattern shows that except China, these nations have their population percentage in urban areas at or below 30 per cent, with Nepal performing the worst. Bangladesh has around a quarter of its population in the urban areas and India is little above this. But interestingly population below the age group of 15 is higher in all these nations than China, which is primarily due to China's one-child family planning model. On the contrary, population above 65 is highest in China, indicating that the country, has a problem of aging population. Fertility rate is high in a country like Bangladesh and others, as compared to China.

Table 1.2 Socio-Economic Indicators of the Region (2000)

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Nepal</i>	<i>Bhuta</i>
2002						
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	63.3	70.5	59.4	56.0	58.6	62.
Adult Literacy (% aged 15 & above)	57.2	84.1	41.3	84.7	41.8	47.
Enrolment Ratio (combined %)	55	73	37	55	60	33
GDP Per Capita (USD PPP)	2,358	3,976	1,602	1,027	1,327	1,412
2010						
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	65.4	73.5	68.9	65.2	68.83	67.
Adult Literacy (% aged 15 & above)	62.8	94.0	55.9	92.2	59.1	52.
Enrolment Ratio (Combined %), 2005	63.8	69.1	56.0	49.5	58.1	59.
GDP Per Capita (USD PPP)	3,296	6,828	1,416	-	1,155	5,113

Source: Human Development Report (2002 and 2011).

Table 1.3 Population Profile of the Region

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Nepal</i>	<i>Bhutan</i>
Total Population (million)						
1975	620.7	927.8	75.6	30.2	13.1	1.2
2000	1,008.9	1,275.1	137.4	47.7	23.0	2.1
2005	1,134.4	1,313.0	153.3	48.0	27.1	0.6
2015	1,302.5	1,388.6	180.1	52.0	32.8	0.7
Annual Population Growth (%)						
1975–2005	2.0	1.2	2.2	1.6	2.3	1.9
2005–15	1.4	0.6	1.6	0.8	1.9	1.5
Urban Population (% of total)						
1975	21.3	17.4	9.9	23.9	5.0	3.4
2000	27.7	35.8	25.0	27.7	11.8	7.1
2005	28.7	40.4	25.1	30.6	15.8	11.1
2015	32.0	49.2	29.9	37.4	20.9	14.8
Population below 15 (% of total)						
2005	33.0	21.6	35.2	27.3	39.0	33.0
2015	28.7	18.5	31.1	23.1	34.1	24.9
Population above 65 (% of total)						
2005	5.0	7.7	3.5	5.6	3.7	4.6
2015	5.8	9.6	4.3	6.3	4.2	5.4
Total Fertility Rate (births per woman)						
1970–75	5.3	4.9	6.2	5.9	5.8	6.7
2000–5	3.1	1.7	3.2	2.2	3.7	2.9

Source: Human Development Report (2002 and 2008).

Note: For 2015 the figures are projected.

Table 1.4 Economic Profile of the Region

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Nepal</i>	<i>Bhutan</i>
GDP Per Capita (USD)						
2009	3,296	6,828	1,416	–	1,155	5,113
GDP Per Capita: Annual Growth Rate (%)						
1990–2005	4.2	8.8	2.9	6.6	2.0	5.6
Share of Income Expenditure (%) 2004						
Poorest 10%	3.6	1.6	3.7	–	2.6	–
Richest 10%	31.1	34.9	27.9	–	40.6	–
Gini Index	36.8	46.9	33.4	–	47.2	–
Total Unemployment Rate as % of Labour Force						
1996–2005	4.3	4.2	4.3	–	1.8	99
Employment by Economic Activity (%) 1996–2005						
Agriculture	67	44	52	63	79	–
Industry	13	18	14	12	6	–
Service	20	16	35	25	21	–
Remittance Inflows (% of GDP)						
2009	3.6	1.0	11.8	–	23.8	–
Public Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)						
2009	4.2	4.6	3.4	2.0	5.8	5.5
Total Expenditure on Health (% of GDP)						
	4.2	4.6	3.4	2.0	5.8	5.5

Source: Human Development Report 2008 and 2011.

The economy at a glance in Table 1.4 indicates how poor the nations of this region are. They also have the problem of uneven distribution of wealth. This is the major cause of social instability and unrest within the nations and causes inter-country migration and other socio-political upheavals. Bangladesh and Nepal are two worst performing neighbours of India in terms of GDP per capita and its annual growth rates. While looking at the income distribution pattern, one can see that China has highest disparity amongst all with poorest 10 per cent sharing 1.6 per cent and richest 10 per cent sharing 35 per cent. China also has the alarming problem of regional disparity with her southwestern part and Tibetan region remaining impoverished, which are the border regions of India's Northeast. Similar is the situation in Nepal and their Gini Index is highest in both these nations. Unemployment rate is almost same for these nations except Nepal, whereas, agriculture still is a predominant economic activity in all these countries. Industrial sector is better in China, whereas service sector is better in other nations.

Such a broad comparative socio-economic scenario of these nations shows that India's neighbours, which border the Northeast, are still underdeveloped except China, which is a fast rising economy in the world. This to a large extent justifies the pressure on this borderland in terms of infiltration and other related cross-border threats. Northeast India also is the gateway for these nations to mainland India for settling and livelihood opportunities for people who desperately want to escape poverty and misery in their own lands. But it is important to understand that China on the contrary with her rising economy has a natural tendency to hegemonise her neighbours through various means like trade and other economic engagements. So on one side, the region bears the brunt of underdevelopment of its neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar, and on other side, it constantly remains aware of the 'China factor', which is having increasing influence in this sub-region. On the positive side, Northeast India has very high potentials of economic resurgence due to its proximity to the economically fast-rising Southeast Asia, with Myanmar as the gateway. Thus, the neighbourhood factor is extremely important for Northeast India's dual issues of security and development. As the former Indian Union Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar once pointed out, very correctly:

For let us not forget the bottom line — ninety-eight per cent of the frontiers of the region share borders with our neighbouring countries. Apart from the Siliguri corridor that is connected to the rest of India, and which constitutes approximately two percent of the total land area of the frontiers, the rest of the North-East is connected to Nepal, Bhutan, the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, Myanmar and above all, to Bangladesh (2008: 20).

He further narrates that

we cannot move forward unless our political relationship with at least two or three countries improves vastly. The richest market in the world closest to the North-East is South-West China. Kunming — the political, economic and communications center of Yunnan province in South-West China — is less than 300 miles from Digboi of Assam. The security argument in India basically is that if you lay a road that will take Indians to China, the same road can be used by the Chinese to get into India. So faced with this dilemma that every road is a two-way path, we find ourselves blocked (Aiyar 2008: 21).

The idea of transregional space can substantially alter the contours of such a ‘two-way path’. Emphasis on the political–economic frame within the region and political and economic diplomacy with its neighbours can build a new road of hope. Northeast India urgently needs regional and sub-regional partners, and the journey towards such policy endeavours needs to continue more vigorously amidst the contemporary security crises of the region. With the rising demand for connectivity, market integration along with the increasing number of trade players, economic diplomacy necessarily assumes immense significance.

NOTE

1. Per Capita Income figures are converted to 2004–5 prices from the CSO 1993–94 and 2004–5 series on NDSP data, Government of India.

2

‘China Factor’ and India’s Frontier

After more than 30 years of the economic liberalisation policy, China has multiplied and strengthened its economy manifold in 2011 with the GDP touching at USD 10.09 trillion (CIA World Factbook 2011), and has claimed to be the second largest economic power in the world after the United States of America (USA). It is now poised to overtake the USA to become the world’s numero uno economy in discrete economic terms. The country has made a remarkable economic impact for last two decades across the world, and more sharply across its neighbouring nations through trans-national and trans-regional trade, investment, infrastructure, and outsourcing network. China’s deliberate policy of expanding economic network through trade and other bilateral economic and infrastructural engagement and support with several nations, especially with its neighbouring nations has to a large extent remained successful to anchor them in terms of economic hegemony. Along with its rising and expanding economy, China is also extending and improving its military power. By modest estimates, China’s military spending in 2011 has remained around USD 91.5 billion, much less than USA’s military budget, which is approximately USD 150 billion (General Mehta 2011). With such fast growing military budget, China is not even hesitant to provide military support to some neighbouring nations and creating perceived threats to some others. Therefore, as its rising strategic, military and economic powers and matrices are spreading tentacles across its neighbouring nations, it is increasingly becoming an important issue for any country to study the ‘China factor’, especially border regions and those that are in close proximity to China. The country incidentally has land and sea boundary issues with 14 neighbours, mostly for historical reasons. Herbert Yee and Ian Storey remark that since the early 1990s, the People’s Republic of China has remained as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and at the same time the perception that China being a rising power

represents a source of regional and international instability, and the so-called China threat has been periodically voiced by both observers of the West and amongst China's neighbours (Yee and Storey 2002: 2).

The perception of the 'China factor' in India needs introspection with far too many variables and in retrospect. The two have had the longest uninterrupted existence as nations. Their combined size and population makes them the largest geographical and human resource mass on the planet. They've also had cultural, religious and trade links going back centuries in history. They came into being as nation-states almost simultaneously in this century, with a shared past of colonial and imperialist subjugation and the consequent freedom struggle. Ironically, these two countries fought a war with each other over disputed frontiers. That conflict episode, the continuing border dispute between the two countries and China's rapid growth in military power, not unsurprisingly creates anxieties about future economic relationship and border sensitivity. China's aggressive foreign policy postures also do not encourage a benign view of it. There are enough strategic thinkers in India who reckon China to be the major future threat to India (Raghavan 1998). The relations between these two countries in modern times already were marked mostly by suspicion and also with the occasional border war (Abdoolcarim 2011: 39). Thus, India views China as a growing, aggressive nationalistic power, who aims to reshape the contours of regional and global balance of power with adverse consequences for Indian interests (Pant 2010: 96). For example, China's attempts to increase its influence in Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar, its persistent refusal to recognise parts of India such as Arunachal Pradesh are perceived as the attempts at preventing the rise of India as a regional player (Wasim 2010: 49). Such increasing influences of China on these nations bear a direct impact on both internal security and development discourses of the frontier region of Northeast India and its shared borders.

BORDERLAND CONCERNS

India's Northeast frontier is one of the closest regions of China's Southwestern part and its Tibetan territory. Unlike Northeast India's other international neighbours like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan which are either politically volatile or economically less developed than

India, China has a stable economy with political autocracy, and has the potential for both threat as well as opportunities for this borderland. Therefore, India needs a much careful policy for the Northeast as far as the 'China factor' is considered. Sikkim, the smallest state in the Northeast and Arunachal Pradesh, the largest state in terms of geographical area, and also some parts of upper Assam are bordering and have remained close neighbours of the Southwestern part of China, that is, the Yunnan Province and the Tibetan Territory. Due to such geographical proximity, India decisively needs to evolve a China policy for Northeast India's development and security concerns, the way China perceives Tibet, Taiwan and terrorism as its three major challenges. Tibet and terrorism have direct impacts on Northeast India's security and development issues. According to Meeta Deka:

So far as the China syndrome is concerned, the question arises as to how the threat poses a strategic challenge to India, especially in relation to the Northeast. China's long term strategy is clearly to become the dominant economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific region and a major power internationally. China's foreign and defence policy initiatives are quite obviously designed to marginalize India in the long term and reduce her to the status of sub-regional power by increasing Chinese influence and leverage in the Southern Asian region. Hence the 'potential for military conflict will always exist' and will in fact increase as the arm might of China increases (2005: 63–64).

Yee and Storey view the perception of such growing China, that can actually be linked to China's aspiration for hegemonic power along with its authoritarian socialist political system, rapid economic growth and historical role as a great power. This 'threat', thus, becomes a latent factor affecting the policies of many countries towards China. Thus, amongst the many prime concerns that authors have advocated towards the China threat, the one that directly relates to this chapter is: 'Will China pose a security threat to its neighbours and to the region?' (Yee and Storey 2002: 2). The perception of this threat is the product of a complex amalgam of factors, which include theoretical disposition of observers, geopolitical location, historical interaction and relations with China, domestic political issues,

economic interests, competing territorial claims, assessments of China's military power, and the shifting contours of geopolitical environment (Yee and Storey 2002: 16). Many such factors are relevant for Northeast India's security perception. Thus, perpetual boundary issue with the Tibetan region, geopolitical location, economic interests of the Southwestern part of China that adjacent the region, and China's persistent support to Northeast India's insurgent groups necessarily demand a deeper strategic understanding of the 'China factor' in Northeast India.

REGIONAL TIES: HISTORICAL LINK

India and China, the two largest civilisations of Asia being geographical neighbours and the world's two biggest population areas, share more similarities and transnational problems than any other neighbouring countries of the contemporary world (Ranganathan 2002: 288). Historically also both India and China co-existed peacefully with their cultural, material and spiritual connections for centuries together. Both were once soulmates through the migration of Buddhism nearly 2,000 years ago (Abdoolcarim 2011: 39). Buddhism always has predominantly remained a strong link between these two nations. Tan Chung interestingly narrates the India-China relation in a three-part saga:

In the first part, India and China were the 'Buddhist twins' and had a mutually beneficial interaction and vibrations for twenty centuries. In the second part, India and China were the 'colonial twins' sharing the pains of Western exploitation and repression as well as the White Man's Burden, and supporting each other's struggle for independence and liberation during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the third part, India and China are becoming the 'geo-civilizational twins' from now on in their united effort to reshape the world order (2010: 3).

In the modern times, China is perceived as the factory of the world and India as the knowledge centre. Therefore, if they orient themselves to work together, they could be a formidable force of two nations (Abdoolcarim 2011: 38). Besides, both nations also share cultural spaces. For example, China's southwestern part has several common ethno-cultural phenomena

with its neighbouring regions of Northeast India, which is vividly described by Ravi Bhoothalingam:

Both are landlocked regions, on opposite sides on the Eastern Himalaya. Of the nine great Asian rivers that originates in Tibet, the Brahmaputra/Zangbo flows into India, with the Yangtze, Salween and Mekong pass through Yunnan. Both regions encompass within themselves great variations in ecology and climate — from high plateau to coniferous forest and mountains to subtropical plains. There is an astonishing range of flora and fauna. Tribes and minority ethnic groups are to be found in an extraordinary array of diversity throughout this region. Arunachal alone has over 100 distinct tribes, while Yunnan has 25 ‘ethnic minority nationalities’, accounting for over a third of China’s minority population. Ethnologically and linguistically, the NER has had long historic links with South-West China as also with the Mon-Khmer-speaking groups in Burma and Thailand. Before modern borders limited trade, there was thriving commerce between these regions. There is now evidence of a ‘Southern Silk Route’, along which trade flowed between China and India through Myanmar and North-East. Indeed, Zhang Qian, a Chinese general, found Yunnanese artifacts in 138 BC that had reached Bactrica through this very route (Bhoothalingam 2008: 134–41).

Sidhu and Yuan argue that the two civilisations had continuous trade and exchange of ideas through centuries. Thus, while Buddhism spread from the plains of northern India to the hinterland of Tibet and China, it was not proselytized through war but by travelling missionaries armed with only *bhikshu* bowls. Similarly, the famous Silk Road, a branch of which extended into the plains of northern India from Taxila, remained more or less functional throughout the political upheavals in China and India until the arrival of the European traders, who either attempted to control it or exploited alternative routes (Sidhu and Yuan 2003: 9). Therefore, though ancient history between the two nations revealed a smooth inter-regional and cross-cultural connectivity, modern history between the two nations in many phases reveals conflicts, which is primarily due to British imperialism from India and Manchu expansionism from China. Also the territorial demarcation

of contemporary India and China is the product of the British and Chinese agreement on Himalayan regions. Thus, many cross-cultural and trans border movements were halted due to the eventual closure of borders and due to various boundary disputes across the countries at different times. One such lost trail, as mentioned by A. K. Ray, was an alternative to the famous Silk Route of the 2nd century BCE, when Chinese traders used to come to India by overland from modern Yunnan through Upper Myanmar and Assam. This was usually the route for diplomatic missions between China and India and also from Rome and Constantinople. This route greatly facilitated a large scale cross-country movement of people during that period in this region, but the trail was lost around the 4th century CE for several hundred years (Ray 2004: 30). Thus, the scholarly world claims that there existed a land route from Yunnan to Upper Assam passing through Bhamo, Kukwang and the Patkai Pass, which was believed to be a portion of the Southern Silk Road (Phukan 2004: 43). The road was used for economic, cultural and political connectivity between the neighbouring nations of Burma, China and India's Northeast. Over centuries, this meandering natural route served for many hazardous journeys (Bhattacharya 2011: 1–14). The border region of the Patkai range is still inhabited by over a dozen ethnic communities — the Singphos (known as Kachin in Myanmar), Lisus, Tangsas, Noctes, Wanchos, Khamtis, Tai Phakes, Ahoms, and Deoris, among others. They have the same culture, clothing style, ornaments, food habits, language and scripts, and agricultural pattern (Barua 2004: 66–67). But over time, the redrawing of boundaries by colonial rulers have distorted such historical and natural cross-border connectivity of people, trade and culture, leading to persistent conflicts and threat to security. Thus, the China threat in India's Northeast has remained perpetual due to unresolved territorial disputes and persistent low-intensity conflicts. Much later, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru attempted to bridge this gap between the periods of pre- and post Independence, and called China a 'great country to which Asia owes so much and from which so much is expected', in the Asia Relations Conference, held in New Delhi in March–April 1947. He characterised the conference as

an expression of that deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationalism which grew up during the

years of European dominations. As that domination goes, the walls that surrounded us fall down and we look at one another again and meet old friends long parted (Guha 2011: 51–61).

McMahon Line and Arunachal Pradesh: A Scar in Sino-Indian Border Relations

Border conflicts between the two nations, therefore, can be traced back to the colonial era of the 19th century, when both China and British India asserted claims to the desolate, remote mountainous areas between the two regions. Rather than resolving the border issue, Chinese and British Indian actions only set the stage for conflict for the future (Barnard 1984: 1). James Barnard skilfully explains that the eastern element of dispute between India and China centres around the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is a sparsely populated mountainous area in extreme Northeast India. Britain acquired the territory in the year 1826 after being victorious in the First Anglo-Burmese War, when the treaty of Yandaboo was signed (Barnard 1984: 1).

[Plate 2.1](#) Line of Actual Control separating India and China



Source: All photographs courtesy of Govind Bhattacharya.

The Tawang Tract in western NEFA had been heavily influenced by Tibetan culture, religion and government for centuries and in the 19th

century, this tract was an important trade route between India and Tibet and attracted the attention of the British. Much later the fall of Chinese power in Tibet led to the negotiation between British Indian, Chinese and Tibetan delegates in the Simla Conference of 1913–14. The British chief delegate Sir Henry McMahon introduced the idea of a second buffer into the long Sino-Tibetan debates over the boundary between Chinese control and Tibetan buffer. McMahon wanted outer Tibet to be the buffer between China and the British Indian frontier and the Inner Tibet to be part of China (*ibid.*). The Simla Convention, though the Chinese had signed it, would in itself have not provided a final solution to the problem of the British border in the Assam Himalayas. The inner and outer Tibet partition would on paper have kept China from direct territorial contact with the tribal hills, but it offered no guarantee that the Tibetans would not, in future, raise claims with Chinese support to rights and influence in the region (that since 1910 was thought to be firmly located within the British sphere). Since 1910, after the Abor Expedition and its offshoots, the British Indian government had a fairly clear idea of where its border in the Assam Himalayas ought to be (Lamb 1966: 522). But China never accepted this concept and prefixed the word ‘illegal’ to the McMahon line or the boundary it represents. The entire area up to the McMahon Line has been under Ahom and, later under British administration. Under the latter, from the outset, tribal areas were under the jurisdiction of the Political Agents or Deputy Commissioners of the adjoining districts. The McMahon Line, as defined in the Anglo-Tibetan notes in 1914 and in the map referred to there, was not an ancient Indian border. It was a new frontier alignment designed to replace the old outer line along the foothills. It was not based on traditions of great age, but was the result of active British surveys (*ibid.*: 531–32). No boundary in the world can claim to have been as free from disputes and as well established by tradition, treaty and administration as the India–China boundary (Gopalachari 1963: 42).

The Simla conference was attended by representatives from British India, Tibet and the Republic of China and resulted in an agreement that made vague references to watersheds and natural boundaries as the border between British India and Tibet. This was the basis for the McMahon line, which moved British control substantially northwards (Sidhu and Yuan 2003: 11). Tibetan and British representatives at the conference agreed to the line,

which ceded Tawang and other Tibetan areas to the imperial British Empire. However, the Chinese representative refused to accept the line. Sidhu and Yuan view that though the Chinese representative at the conference initialled the document but the central government at Beijing never formally signed it. Thus, the legitimacy of McMahon line was perennially challenged by the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek and the communist government of Mao Tse-tung. Therefore, at the time of Independence, India's Northeast forcefully had to inherit one of the longest, poorly demarcated and disputed borders with an important neighbour — Tibet and later China (ibid.). And in the late 1940s, with the advent of new regimes in India and China, the dimension of this border problem gave rise to new border politics. The creation of the Indian republic in 1947 and the withdrawal of British power from the Indian subcontinent led to the beginning of a changing power balance in Asia. When the Communist regime emerged strongly in 1949, the balance of power tipped even further; however, border issues continued in the frontier region (ibid.: 10). B. R. Deepak argues that 'the entire length of the border according to India is about 4,250 km, though largely undemarcated; it follows the geographical principle of watershed, which in most places is the crest of the high mountains' (2005: 188). The disputed border is divided into Western, Central and Eastern sectors, though this chapter deals with the eastern sector, which starts from east of Nepal and proceeds east and northeast and then crosses the Lohit River to join the tri-junction of the Indian, Burmese and Chinese boundaries near the Diphu Pass. Deepak further mentions that

the boundary in dispute forms the border between Tibet Autonomous Region and Arunachal Pradesh of India. The boundary in Eastern Sector is over 1,000 kilometers long and according to China, it has over 90,000 square kilometers of disputed area, biggest among all sectors. In this sector, India upholds McMahon Line delimits the boundary, but China deems this Line as 'illegal' and claims over 50,000 square kilometer territory. As could be gleaned from the above mentioned Chinese claim line, Chinese alignment more or less conforms to the 'inner line' alignment (2005: 194).

Till today, not a single Chinese government has recognised the McMahon Line as a legal boundary; they, nonetheless, regarded this as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) ever since the People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into Tibet. For China, the McMahon Line stands as a symbol of imperialist aggression on the country. M. Taylor Fravel (2009), a leading expert on China's border problems, believes that the genesis of the border problem goes back to the period of state formation of both modern India and the People's Republic of China and McMahon line and other British policies were the contributing factors. On 15 November 1960, Pandit Nehru firmly declared in the Parliament that 'McMahon Line is our boundary, map or no map' (Dhar 1991: 63). Thus, this border dispute had continued to affect Sino-Indian relations harshly even in the post-colonial period, which further deteriorated in the 1950s. Indian officials have firmly maintained that the McMahon Line would remain the natural, traditional, ethnic, and administrative boundary in this area, though the Chinese have taken the opposite view (Lamb 1966: 531).

Nevertheless, in the early 1950s, Pandit Nehru also attempted to rebuild the trust and friendship by developing solidarity between these two newly independent Asian nations. He once wrote to his chief ministers in June 1952, 'a variety of circumstances pull India and China towards each other, in spite of differences of forms of government. This is the long pull of geography and history and, if I may add, of the future' (Guha 2011: 53). And in April 1954, both nations decided to enter into a new relationship of friendship and signed an agreement regarding trade, travel and representation between India and the 'Tibet region of China'. As pointed out by Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea:

The new relationship was given sanction and legitimacy by making a 25 century-old friendship the unifying centripetal force of this new type of state relationship. This history laid emphasis on an equally contrived, highly evocative memory of a civilisational neighbourliness, free of conflict for all those centuries, and enriched by a readiness to borrow, learn and share ... In 1954, Nehru and Zhou Enlai drew up and codified the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and presented these to the world as alternate and more desirable norms of interstate behaviour. The Panchsheel, as these came to be known, were first

announced in the Nehru–Zhou joint statement of 1954, and were later included in the preamble to the India–China treaty of Tibet (2005: 30–31).

Plate 2.2 The Border Outpost through which the invading Chinese Army had entered India in 1962



This agreement included a pledge of non-aggression, the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence’: mutual respect for each other’s territorial

integrity/sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual noninterference in each other's affairs, equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful co-existence. But in reality, even after six decades of Independence, such an attempt of goodwill did not affect nor address the prolonged border disputes on the McMahon line, where very little also could be achieved militarily and through diplomatic solution. Thus, the relation between the two nations gradually and steadily deteriorated primarily on border dispute. Pandit Nehru later in an interview with the American journalist Edgar Snow in 1959 justified such dispute by saying that

the basic reason for the Sino-Indian dispute was that they were both 'new nations', in that both were newly independent and under dynamic nationalistic leaderships, and in a sense were meeting at their 'frontiers' for the first time in the history; hence it was natural that a certain degree of conflict should be generated before they could stabilize their frontiers (Guha 2011:59).

Nehru also said that in the past there were buffer zones between these two countries, but now both for the first time confronting as modern nations on the borders (ibid.).

Such disputed territorial issues, as argued by C. V. Ranganathan, have remained a long-standing challenge to the ingenuity of decision-makers in both nations. He argues that India is in administrative and military control over the state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims. China is in possession of north-eastern Ladakh ('Aksai Chin'), which India claims. He further states that in the collective subconscious of the people of both countries and more particularly among political leaders and armed forces, boundary disputes play a prominent role (Ranganathan 2002: 289). He has argued elsewhere that it has become clear in the last few years that the Chinese are unhappy with this status quo with regard to Arunachal Pradesh, especially since India is making long-neglected investments in improving connectivity within that state and in infrastructure projects to harness its vast water resources (Ranganathan 2010: 73). Deka further points out the claims of China on Arunachal Pradesh — that reunification of Arunachal Pradesh is imperative for its military. Thus, a potentially conflict prone situation exists between the two sides due to the varying perceptions of the precise locations

on the ground and on the map across several points on the LAC in places such as Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. This long-standing territorial dispute has hardly seen any solution so far, thus hindering their long-term stability. False maps on the India–China–Tibet boundary have been published regularly by China. The McMahon Line in the east and the boundary along Ladakh (Aksai Chin) in the west remained a boundary by usage and was not demarcated, leading to border skirmishes in 1962 and the Chinese penetration into the Sumdorong Chu Valley of Arunachal Pradesh in 1986. Thus, border incidents due to patrols, misleading maps or losing their way do occur intermittently. China has clearly laid stress on the doctrine of ‘active defence’ and in recent years it has also engaged in upgrading logistics and infrastructure facilities in the Indo-China border areas (Deka 2005: 64–65).

1962 Border War: The Other Scourge for Northeast India

A decade earlier, when Pandit Nehru visited Northeast India, he insisted that there was not the

slightest reason to expect any aggression on our north-eastern frontier. A little clear thinking will show that it is a frightfully difficult task for any army to cross Tibet and the Himalayas to invade India. Tibet is one of the most difficult and inhospitable of countries. An army may possibly cross it, but the problem of logistics and feeding it becomes increasingly difficult. The climate is itself an enemy of any large-scale movement. Apart from this, there was no particular reason why China should think of aggression in this direction (Deka 2005: 64–65).

But Nehru was proved to be wrong when the border war of 1962 broke in this difficult terrain to make the relationship between these two nations worse. The intense border war in late autumn of 1962 between India and China in the eastern frontier of India resulted in the rout of an underprepared and poorly-led Indian army, but was seen in national, civilisational and ideological terms (Guha 2011: 51). And after more than five decades of such an incident, it is moot to ask what India has learnt from the October 1962 border war. One irrefutable lesson has been a deep perpetual anxiety about the China factor in India’s security paradigm, especially for the Northeast

region (Bhaskar 2011). The war had largely traumatised the people of the Northeast, who were then struggling from India's 15-year-old Partition and its border redrawing with East Pakistan through the Radcliffe boundary line. It had badly damaged the region with territorial, economic and human security issues, and continues to remain a very significant void in the psyche of Northeast.

Thus, the war of 1962 largely affected security at the regional level. The frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh was mainly affected and devastated extensively, and till date the fear of border war perpetually exists in the minds of the local people. In fact, relations between the two nations started deteriorating rapidly after the Dalai Lama's escape from Lhasa in the year 1959. He crossed the McMahon line to enter India and was assured of political asylum by Pandit Nehru. He reached India to set up a Tibetan government-in-exile at Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh. James Barnard later points out that China became suspicious of India's help to Tibetan rebels, which further aggravated Sino-Indian problems, with China sealing off the Indian frontier along the McMahon line. With continued failure of diplomatic efforts, the uncompromising attitudes of both sides remained unchanged until the outbreak of hostilities in 1962 that lasted from 10 October 1962 to 20 November 1962. The actual fighting took place in three widely separated areas of Walong, Tawang and Aksai Chin.

It is significant that while over 1,21,730 sq. km of frontier were in contention between China and India, the fighting was confined to areas where the Chinese felt that they had legitimate claims. No official boundary over the 4,023 km frontier had been ever negotiated and established between the two nations (Barnard 1984: 14). Thus, when this border war broke out, Chinese troops forcibly evicted Indian troops from the Dhola Post in the eastern sector, which lay beyond the McMahon Line that the Indian army had established as part of the forward policy under 'Operation Onkar'. In the next two months, until their unilateral withdrawal on 21 November 1962, the Chinese troops easily overwhelmed the ill-prepared Indian forces in all sectors along the McMahon Line (Sidhu and Yuan 2003: 15) and dramatically declared the ceasefire after achieving its limited strategic objectives. Following the ceasefire, China kept the territory around its military highway, but gave India about 70 per cent of the disputed border lands (Barnard 1984: 3). As argued by Sinha Bhattacharjea, such a

withdrawal of the Chinese military forces in 1962 practically left all of the McMahon Line areas, claimed, controlled and administered by India. China, therefore, cannot change this position unless they undertake another military adventure, which henceforth would be tough, since Indian defence in this border area is no longer as inadequate as 1962. But the 1962 episode has never become a closed chapter in India–China relations, and various hitches and tensions seem to be perpetual, mainly affecting Arunachal Pradesh. However, China’s overall diplomatic relations with India has not reached any high emotive level on the McMahon line since 1962 (Sinha Bhattacharjea 2001: 277). But such perpetual border skirmishes have extensively disrupted economic communication in years to come, and remained in a coma for two decades, if not more, destroying several thriving economies of Northeast India, such as cottage industries in border areas, which were dependent on cross-border transactions in terms of markets and source materials (Singh 2007: 291). For India and its Northeast frontier, 1962 was a trauma, which not only collapsed India–China amity but also ruined the structure of Nehru’s foreign policy and affected the foundation of his world view. Post-1962, India had to put much more emphasis on two pressing concerns: first, on territorial definition and consolidation, which anchored as the core issue in the neighbourly relations, especially with China and Pakistan; and second, on the security paradigm (Sinha Bhattacharjea 2001: 344). Since 1962, the strategic importance of Arunachal Pradesh vis-à-vis Tawang has remained very high for India and the Indian army has maintained their presence in this area and plays a role of morale booster for the people there.

Arunachal Pradesh: ‘Tryst with Destiny’

Tracing back the history of Arunachal Pradesh, which has remained within the mists of tradition and myth, it was a part of the Ahom kingdom in the pre-colonial period and continued to remain under Assam province during the British colonial period. It was the outer most region of the Northeast frontier of the British Raj. Under colonial administration it used to be called as North-East Frontier Tracts and the British followed a policy of non-interference towards the region. This territorial concept of Arunachal Pradesh did not change much in post-colonial India, and instruments such as

the inner line and direct administration by the central government through the governor as its representative were continued. Till 1965, Arunachal Pradesh continued under direct central rule, despite being a part of the state of Assam. Its administrative units continued to be called 'frontier divisions' and its charge continued to rest with the Ministry of External Affairs. But after the 1962 war, India made an inclusionary vision for Arunachal Pradesh, and this frontier region was brought under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1972, followed by the formation of districts with Deputy Commissioners in charge like elsewhere in India. Thus, it is only in the aftermath of the 1962 war that the reorganisation of Arunachal Pradesh, leading eventually to state formation, was seen as an exercise in integrating a frontier region that is positioned dangerously close to the powerful China (Goswami 2007).

Arunachal Pradesh has eventually become one of the prime issues in terms of having a high potential for conflict between India and China, which can severely affect and destabilise India's Northeast to a large extent. The state, situated between the Shivalik and Himalayan ranges, is known as the land of 'dawn-lit mountains', and is now perceived as the most strategic state in the country with a 1,080 km international borderline with China. It has remained a very poor victim of difficult geographical terrain and for its historicity. After India's Independence, as mentioned earlier, it became Assam's NEFA. Later, NEFA became a Union Territory and was named Arunachal Pradesh by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was only on 20 February 1987 that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi laid the foundation of Arunachal Pradesh having a landmass of 83,743 sq. km in Northeast India's eight conglomeration as a state within the Indian Union and was fragmented from Assam. Since then Arunachal Pradesh has remained as an independent full-fledged state. This independent state, as pointed out by Namrata Goswami, is still significantly designed as a restricted area and requires two kinds of permits for outsiders to enter: the Inner Line Permit and the Protected Area Permit. The former is for the Indians other than locals to enter the state and the latter is for foreigners (Goswami 2011). Despite having many challenges of development, which even at the dawn of Independence, was steeped in poverty and illiteracy, the state has resisted internal conflicts, cross-border activities to inflate the security scenario and proved its integrity to the Indian Union, and has remained internally a peaceful state, unlike other volatile states of the region. Even in the recent

past, when Chinese officials have claimed the whole of Arunachal Pradesh as part of China, it invited protest demonstrations within Arunachal Pradesh.

But over the years, the state has been gradually changing and has emerged as a state of violence and conflicts. The state of Arunachal Pradesh, believed to be the 'most peaceful state' in Northeast India, has its own share of turbulence, much of it, clearly 'spill-overs' from the events unfolding in the immediate neighbourhood (Upadhyay 2009: 46). The state is witnessing the consolidation of Arunachalese identity, which more often than not manifest as a struggle against non-indigenous populations, the representatives of the Government of India and the immigrants, particularly the Chakma and Hajong refugees. An important militant outfit in the state known as the Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF) was formed in 1996 (ibid.). While most of the districts of Arunachal Pradesh have remained peaceful, two of them like Tirap and Changlang have been affected by insurgent violence from the bordering state of Nagaland due to the activities led by National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak–Muivah) NSCN (IM) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) NSCN (K). The latter group has a strong presence amongst the Konyak tribes in these two districts (Goswami 2011). Along with this growing underground militancy, a rising identity politics, ethnic rivalry, heavy corruption, and underdevelopment can also be seen. There is an utter lack of governance and administrative failure across the state, which needs immediate measures, otherwise being the most border sensitive state and of Chinese interest, Arunachal Pradesh can, in no time, become other most volatile state in the region. According to sources, Maoist groups with the help of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) cadre are opposing development projects, such as hydro-power, which was initiated in the Assam–Arunachal border, and have been trying to gain influence over the local population on the issue of ecological concerns. But Arunachal Pradesh, known as the powerhouse of India, is, at present, witnessing construction of dams for generating 10,000 megawatts (MW) power to counter Maoist influence. The Maoist networks spreading in the Dibang valley district bordering China can pose a more serious threat (Singh 2011). Also, the growing presence of such left-wing extremism, even in the Tinsukia district of Assam and in adjoining districts of Arunachal Pradesh and their recruitment drive, is raising serious security concerns. Such

internal security discord can be extremely dangerous and can act as a fertile ground for China's influence in the state.

POTENTIAL 'CHINA THREATS' TO NORTHEAST INDIA: POST-1962 SCENARIO

Issue of Insurgency

Between 1962 and 1969, Sino-Indian relations remained in a deep freeze. Emboldened by its easy victory over India, China initiated a vitriolic and vituperative propaganda campaign against India, which deepened India's suspicion of China even further. India's mistrust about China was further confirmed when China befriended Pakistan and started to extend military and political support to it. China on the contrary essentially saw Indo-Soviet friendship as an anti-China ploy (Deepak 2005: 274).

In this scenario, it is important to see what actually had happened to India's fragile frontier, and what role China had played towards this weak and volatile region of India. It was not a very friendly and co-operating gesture that China had extended towards this region, rather it had explored Northeast India's negative factors and had damaged her security scenario to a large extent. For example, China has fuelled Northeast India's internal unrest and insurgency factor by extending and facilitating training to the militant groups — Nagas and Mizos at that point of time were given systematic armed training and were sent back to foment trouble in India. As pointed out by Archana Upadhyay, China's ideological and technical support to the Northeast ultra-groups is believed to date back to the 1950s, when the neighbourly relations between the two nations started deteriorating. However it was only after the 1962 war with India over the disputed borders, China's involvement in this border region became more unconcealed (Upadhyay 2009: 48). And post-1962, China deliberately became approachable to the Naga National Council (NNC) and the first batch of Naga Army left for China from the border village of Totok in June 1966. A batch of 300 fighters led by commander Thinoselie and Commissar Muivah reached Yunnan after an arduous journey comprising 97 days. Muivah was admitted to the College of Diplomacy in Beijing and others were given guerrilla training. The Chinese trained four such subsequent batches of Naga guerrillas, and Indian military intelligence estimates that both Pakistan and China together have trained nearly 5,000 Naga guerrillas in all (Bhaumik 2009: 158). Hongwei Wang also affirms that China encouraged both the Naga and Mizo insurgency in India's Northeast (Wang 1998: 284). Deepak

further points out that during the period of 1962 to 1979, China systematically supported, encouraged, trained our Naga and Mizo insurgents in the military camps inside China and infiltrated then back to India. He further writes that various reports in Chinese media hailed Naga and Mizo struggle for ‘national liberation’ (Deepak 2005: 284). According to Bhaumik again the powerful rebel army on Burma’s Western borders, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) developed close links with Northeast India’s separatist group like NNC, the NSCN and the ULFA. They first helped the Naga rebels to reach China in 1966, and then they trained and armed the NSCN, the ULFA and at least two Manipuri rebel groups. China along with Pakistan and Bangladesh have aided and abetted rebel groups from Northeast as part of a deliberate design to destabilise India’s frontier regions. Chinese support according to Bhaumik for these rebels started in the mid-1960s and is said to have ended in the early 1980s, but there are some fresh indications that Chinese intelligence are in touch with at least two Northeast Indian rebel groups after India signed a nuclear deal with United States and decided to enter into a ‘strategic partnership’ with them (Bhaumik 2009: 151). Subir Bhaumik also says:

China started aiding the NNC, the MNF and the later the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur but discontinued all help after 1980. There have been reports of the ULFA and the Manipuri groups receiving substantial quantities of Chinese weapons through Bhutan and Burma, but my own investigations indicate that these weapons are coming through Yunnan-based mafia groups like the Ah Hua and the Blackhouse — and in the last four — five years through the United Wa State Army, in whose ‘liberated areas’, the Chinese have actually allowed weapons manufacturing franchise. These mafia groups also buy the heavier weapons like mortars from China’s government ordnance factories like Norincho and it is hard to accept that Beijing and its vigilant intelligence agencies will not know of these surreptitious weapons sale to the enemies of India. But it is difficult to establish whether Beijing is supplying weapons to rebel groups in northeast India by fronting the mafia proxies (2009: 156).

Though by early 1980s, China's support towards Northeast India's underground guerrillas has gone down, but 'China threat' remains as potential and powerful for the region as before for many other reasons. As pointed out by K. Subrahmanyam: 'China is likely to keep the border issues alive, as part of such an exercise with India. The one party system and autonomy to the minority areas do not go together, nor do human rights and religious freedom' (2010: 112). He further points out that even in recent times, as reported Paresh Baruah, the ULFA separatist leader is sheltering in China and also Indian Maoists have access to weaponry of Chinese origin (ibid.). Officials said that arrested United National Liberal Front (UNLF) leader R. K. Meghan told his Indian interrogators that he met ULFA leader Paresh Baruah, who is based in Yunan, at the Shanghai Expo in China in 2010 for weapon supplies and training (*Hindustan Times* 2011). Another interrogation of NSCN (IM) chief weapons procurer Anthony Shimray, who was arrested in the year 2010, clearly reveals that China is fighting in troubled water in Northeast. Mr Shimray had confessed that he paid USD 800,000 to a Bangkok-based company in April 2011 to source rocket launchers, rifles, grenades and pistols for the NSCN (IM) group. Indian Government also has cautioned recently that China's unhealthy interest in Northeast India has been taken up with China both diplomatically and through the aegis of counter-terror cooperation. However, China persistently denies giving help to insurgent groups, particularly to ULFA, UNLF, NSCN (IM), and PLA (*Hindustan Times* 2011). The other source confirms that leaders of PLA outfit have been recently accused of training even the CPI (Maoist) cadre and providing it arms, which are sourced from China. The PLA and Maoists have agreed on a joint declaration intending to form a 'Strategic United Front' to extend support to each other, and then intend to include other outfits of Northeast and also the terror outfits of Kashmir. PLA is also known to route arms from China through the Myanmar border, and had recently also returned INR 27 lakh to another Northeast outfit NDFB after it was unable to smuggle in Chinese arms through this Myanmar route (*The Economic Times* 2011). Although observers believe that over the years, China's strategic priorities in South Asia have visibly shifted from a position of blatant hostility towards India to 'passive hostility', there are indications to suggest that ties between China and North Eastern insurgent groups are not dormant. With critical differences between India and China still

remaining unresolved, India's apprehensions about Chinese intentions in the region, therefore, continue to be a cause of strategic concern (Upadhyay 2009: 48).

Issue of Border Trade

For centuries, border trade between India and China flourished before it closed in 1962 after the war. But with the rebuilding of political diplomacy, initiated in late 1980s after Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China, it was also agreed to resume the old border trade connection. So in 1991 both the nations agreed on promoting trade relations through negotiations and signed a Memorandum of Understanding even to resume overland border trade and exchange of commodities by the residents along the border areas of two countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit (Elumalai 2009: 46–47). Thus, the Sino-Indian Memorandum on Nathu La as border trade point in 2003 signified China's *de facto* recognition of India's sovereignty over Sikkim, and Beijing handed over a new official map to India showing Sikkim as a state of India (Wasim 2010: 269). Other routes like Lipulekh in Uttar Pradesh and Shipkila in Himachal Pradesh and Northeast route Nathu La in Sikkim too became open for border trade between them. Nathu La opened again in 2006 after 44 years of its closure, generating immense hope and enthusiasm among the people of this region. Nathu La, according to Mishra, is a mountainous pass between India and China, 12,400 feet above sea level, and has a long history; it was part of the Old Southern Silk Route and actually served as a connector between these two neighbours and also accounted for a large volume of bilateral trade (2009: 67). In 2006 again, both countries agreed to use Nathu La as the point for the entry and exit of people, exchange of commodities and means of transport. On the Indian side, Sherathang, located 47 km away from Gangtok and 5 km from Nathu La, and in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Donquingang, located 17 km away from Nathu La, were designated as border trade marts. The Central government and the Sikkim state government initiated various constructive measures to operationalise this route, such as creating a Nathu La trade study group, construction of the trade mart, issuing travel pass for the traders, list of commodities which are permissible for trade, with 15 items for import and 29 items for export, and evaluating the performance of this border trade on regular basis (Elumalai 2009: 48–51).

India's import substitution economy after 1947 deprived the Northeast of its natural markets, as did the Bangladesh war in 1971. There were massive

imports into the region, and Chinese consumer goods are to be seen in every marketplace. The exchange rate is unreasonably low for Chinese imports, and these goods have obviously not come through established channels. Illegal trade and smuggling exist because there is no trade facilitation (Srinivasan 2009: 6). Such illegal border trade through several points along the border areas has made Northeast market as the dumping ground for the cheap Chinese goods for a long time, so another view that prevailed was opening up of Northeast India could soon turn to be a readymade market for Chinese goods. Now after re-opening of this trade route, which has also fulfilled the emotional desire of many people, it is essential to gauge the situation. The importance of Nathu La needs to be understood from the overall perspective of political, strategic and economic prosperity. According to M. G. Kiran, an Indian administrator,

[Plate 2.3](#) Inside View of Serathang Mart

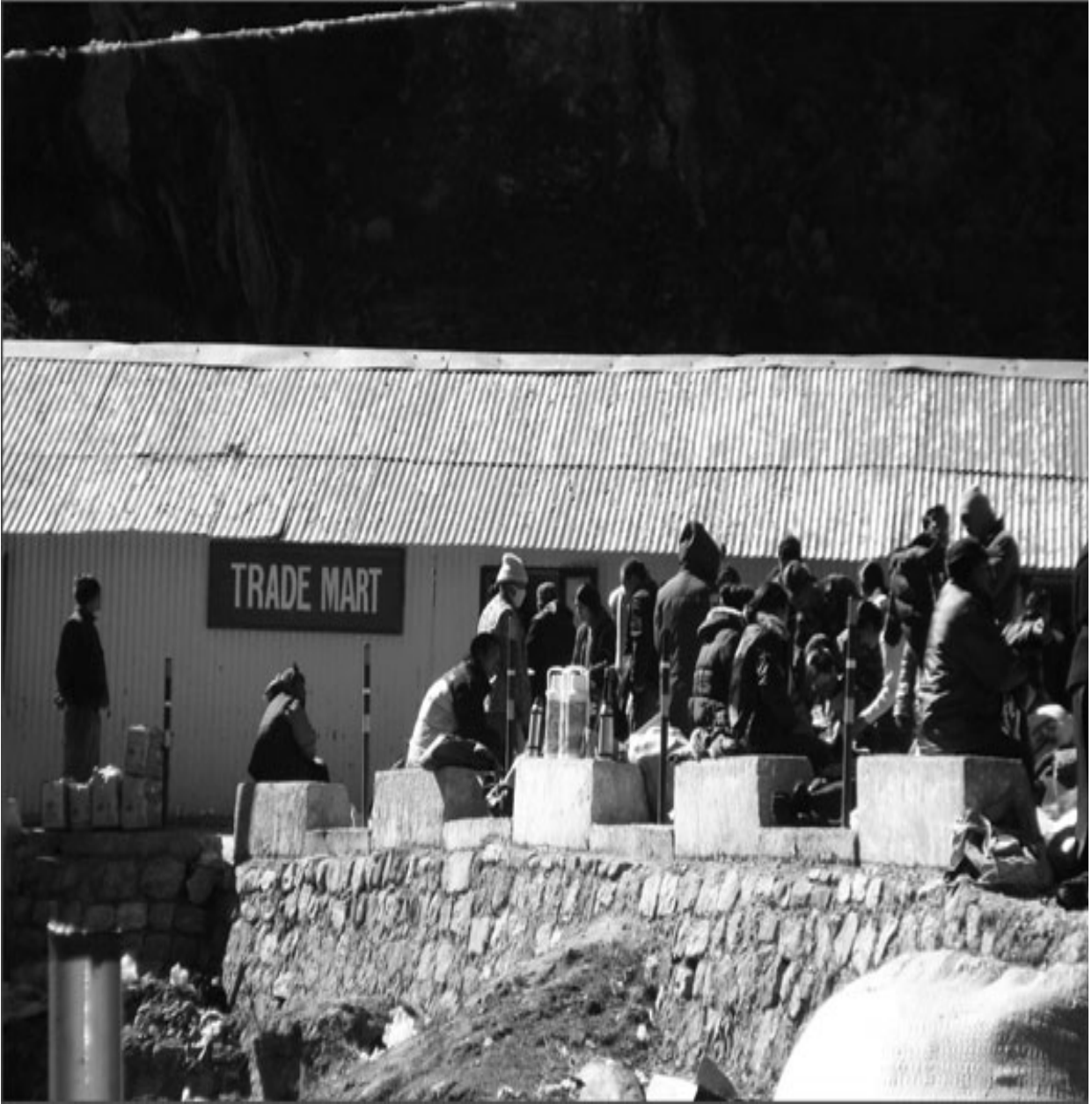
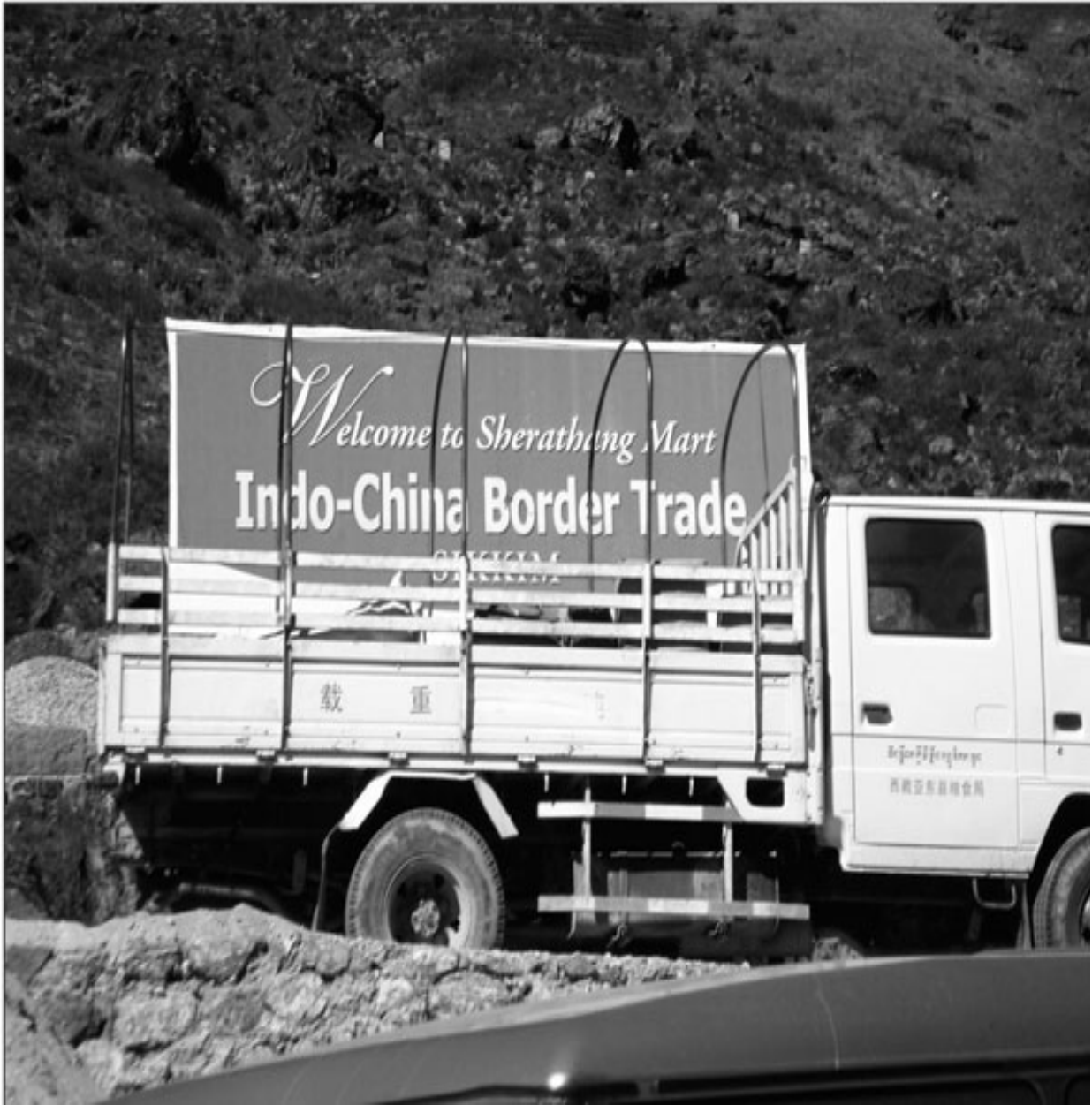
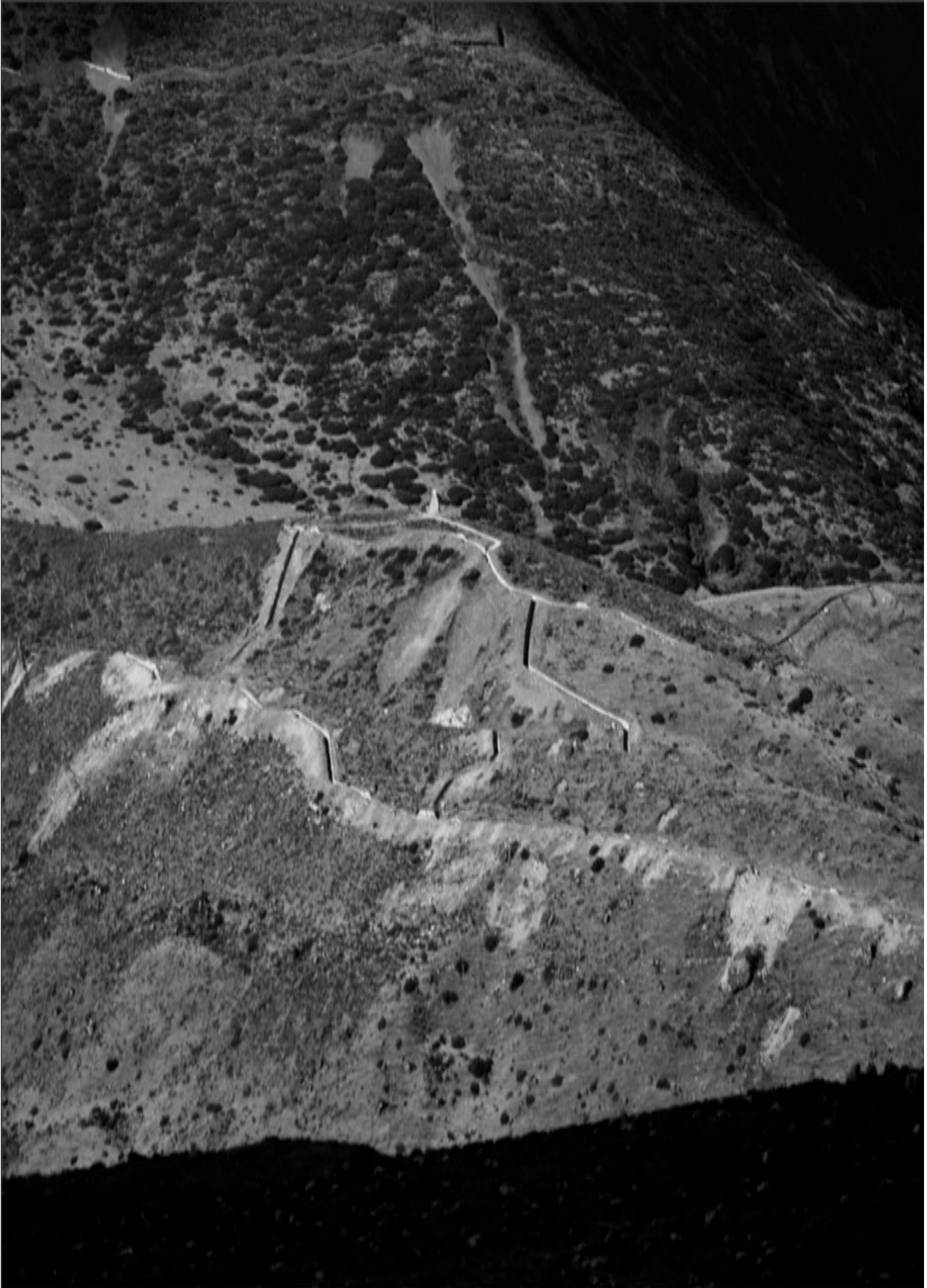


Plate 2.4 Another View of Serathang Mart



[Plate 2.5](#) Chinese Move on Road to the Other Side of LAC



Nathu La — the pass of listening ear in Tibet — is an international border of two Asian giants, India and China. Barely 52 kms away from the state capital, Gangtok of Sikkim, it is situated at an altitude of 4310 ft above sea level. History was created at this very place on the 6th of July 2006, when Nathu La trade route to TAR of China was reopened, establishing the historical-cultural and commercial linkages between the two great civilizations — India and China. It was a historic occasion for the people of India in general and of Sikkim in particular. It was not only a confidence building measure but brought pride, joy and credit to Sikkim for providing India and China a space of reiterating and promoting ‘Panchsheel’, the five principles of coexistence that govern the relationship between the two powers. Although it took some time for Beijing to realise the importance of Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai, China has finally recognised India’s sovereignty over Sikkim. Beijing took a long time to accept the ground reality that Sikkim is a part of the Indian Union (2009: 38).

During my field trip to Nathu La in November 2007, after around one-and-half year of its re-opening, I found and witnessed the mixed emotions and feelings of the people of Sikkim. A large part of Sikkim had accepted the re-opening of this route, which they thought would provide a corridor for cross-border trade and for other connectivity network. After so many years of distrust, this lost link was expected to restore the trust, goodwill and understanding. This distrust, as pointed out by many, needs to be erased by more people-to-people contact, friendship network, goodwill visits, restoration of cultural links, and tourism through Buddhist circuit which actually can create an ambience for future strength of economic co-operation. But there are also other opinions by scholars like Mohd. Wasim, who says that the opening of the Nathu La trade route that connects Tibet and Sikkim has been much trumpeted by the Indian government as a major achievement of Indian diplomacy. However, this step as he thinks is fraught with dangers as there is no certainty that the internal threat posed by Chinese infiltration would not get worse with the opening of Nathu La (Wasim 2010: 48). From the border trade perspective as well, Nathu La has not been a successful experiment so far, despite over five years of existence. The trade has been limited both in the number of items that can be cross-exchanged

and the volume that is an insignificant figure in the overall bilateral trade between the nations. Apparently, infrastructure bottlenecks are the main hurdles. Also in the post-1962 period, the trajectory of the erstwhile trade through Nathu La has shifted to other routes and it is indeed a difficult task to reorient the same. Currently this pass, which once was vibrant with Indo-Tibetan trade, is being increasingly doubted whether it can ever regain that strength to serve as an economic bridge between India and China (Singh 2011). From the economic perspective, Nathu La is far from optimal border trade route, especially from Sikkim's perspective, as the basic infrastructure like road and connectivity are not satisfactory to make maximum benefit out of it. For example, Sikkim has only one road linking its capital Gangtok to Nathu La and one landslide-prone road, just 5 m wide, joining the state with the rest of India. Sikkim's road density is 28.45 km per 100 sq. km against the national average of 84 km. The other border state Arunachal Pradesh is even worse off, with a road density of just 18.65 km per 100 sq. km. No trains run to the border-states of Sikkim, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. Tripura started its train service in 2008, connecting to Assam. Arunachal Pradesh also started train services with Assam in 2014, but local youths of the state have resisted this with the apprehension of infiltration. The other existing connectivity and road infrastructure across Northeast India is extremely poor for improving economic and trade relations with any of the bordering nations. China, on the other hand, as pointed out by Sudha Ramachandran, plans to extend the Golmud-Lhasa rail up to Yatung, a trading centre near Nathu La, a mountain pass that connects Tibet with Sikkim, and to Nyingchi, a trading town north of Arunachal Pradesh at the tri-junction with Myanmar (Ramachandran 2009). But on the contrary, the development of infrastructure by China in its border regions with India has been so rapid and effective, and the Indian response so lackadaisical that an Indian Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh was forced to suggest a rail link from China, so that the state gets connectivity network with mainland India (Pant 2010: 98).

Against such backdrop, it becomes extremely important for India to assess the border roads infrastructure and connectivity in this strategically crucial frontier region. India urgently needs to boost its infrastructure plan in the Northeastern sector, resisting the region's age-old xenophobia of infiltration,

which can largely help to catch up with Chinese economy and trade in this front.

This paucity of road infrastructure in border areas is in fact being addressed now. In 2006, the government gave the green signal for a host of road and other infrastructure projects in border areas. It recently announced an investment of US\$3 billion in road construction in border areas (Pant 2010: 98).

Thus, as pointed out by K. Subrahmanyam that such development strategy of India needs to continue and the country needs to engage China through trade, investment and technological exchanges, compete with China in economic performance and knowledge generation. India also needs to project a defence and diplomatic posture of being able to stand up to China being reducing India's vulnerabilities. Therefore, this calls for a rapid development of long neglected border infrastructure, modernising the Indian armed forces and nurturing our partnership with all major democratic powers. India also needs to encourage Chinese tourism and interaction between think tanks and scholastic communities (Subrahmanyam 2010: 112–13). The border trade between India and China has existed right from beginning as the most potent instrument for building mutual trust and for creating the right atmospherics for border negotiations. Since the disputed India–China border remains the most intractable problem, it has been contended that the border trade must be viewed in terms not of its statistical value, but of its value as an important confidence building measure, leading to transformation in the lives and perceptions of people living in the remote and isolated border regions of India and China. It is stressed that there remains a strong need to appreciate its direct impact on the welfare of the respective border communities. Besides, border trade was also expected to enhance mutual confidence and thereby reduce border management and security costs over a period of time (Singh 2007: 289).

Issue of Tawang

The other factor which has never been erased from the psyche of both nations, even after innumerable attempts of good and friendly neighbourly relations, is the border and boundary dispute having Tawang as the central factor, and it has been surfacing and resurfacing time and again. Thus, unlike Sikkim, China has persistently remained in the security paradigm of Arunachal Pradesh even after 50 years of 1962 war. So when one looks into the future direction of relations between China and India, the two recently booming economies, it can decisively be said that these two nations will be major players in determining broader political and economic trends in emerging Asia. While on the surface, as mentioned by Rajat Pandit, India–China relations appear to be improving on economic and trade relations, both sides harbor deep suspicions of the other’s strategic and security intentions. Signs of their deep-seated disagreements have begun to surface in the recent years and it is likely that such friction will continue, given their unsettled borders, China’s interest in consolidating its hold on Tibet, and India’s expanding influence in Asia. China has moved slowly on border talks and conducted several incursions into the Indian state Arunachal Pradesh again since January 2008 (Pandit 2011). Thus, it can interestingly be said that within Northeast India, China plays different roles in two of its border states — Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Through Sikkim, China wants more economic domination in the region with increasing border trade and making Chinese products easily available in Northeast market, whereas through Arunachal Pradesh, China is firmly playing strategic and military domination with its perpetual border dispute and the issue of Tawang. As argued by Pant,

Sino-Indian frictions are growing and potential for conflict remains high. Alarm is rising in India because of frequent and strident claims being made by China along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh. Indians have complained that there has been a dramatic rise in Chinese intrusions into the Indian territory over last two years, most of them along the border in the regions of Arunachal Pradesh that China refers to as ‘Southern Tibet’ (Pant 2010: 95–96).

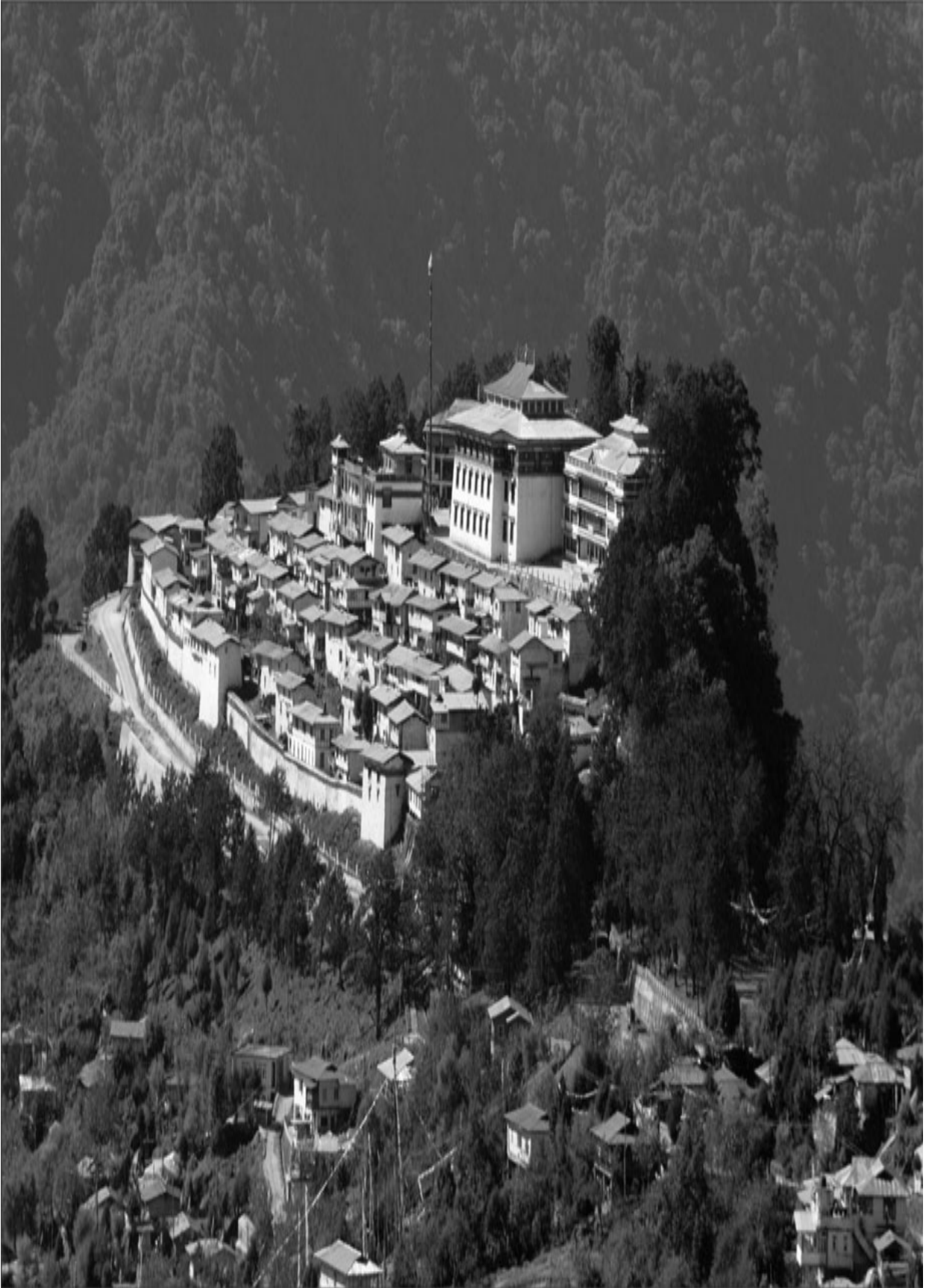
Plate 2.6 Se-la pass on the way to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh



Thus, the Northeastern region is afresh in China's attention concerning Tawang and created a fresh friction in the relation between India and China. Tawang is a thickly forested area of white stupas and steep terraced hillsides, which is the home of Monpa tribes, who practice Tibetan Buddhism and speak a language similar to Tibetan. The sixth Dalai Lama was born here in the 17th century. In some ways this small place has become a proxy battleground too for China and Dalai Lama (Wasim 2010: 277). Lisa Curtis points out that 'China lays claim to more than 34,000 sq. miles of India's Northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. India is a long-term host to the Dalai Lama and about 100,000 Tibetan refugees, although the Indian government forbids them from participating in any political activity. The Chinese have recently toughened their position during border talks by insisting that the Tawang district — a pilgrimage site for Tibetans in Arunachal Pradesh — be ceded to China. The Indians refused the demand and reiterated their position that any areas with settled populations would be excluded from territorial exchanges' (Curtis 2008). Of the Tibetan refugees that came to India at that period, around 15,000 settled in Arunachal Pradesh (Goswami 2007). Sudha Ramachandran further argues that Indian military experts are of the opinion that Arunachal's importance to China lies in its geography. Control over Arunachal Pradesh will enable the Chinese to militarily overrun the Brahmaputra Valley and the rest of Northeastern India. China seeks to control over Arunachal Pradesh, and specifically Tawang, to consolidate its hold over Tibet. One also needs to remember that Tawang is the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama and the monastery there is Tibetan Buddhism's second largest after the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The Tawang Monastery is 'a virtual treasure trove of Tibetan Buddhist religion and culture' and is seen by Tibetans as the repository of perhaps the last remnants of a Tibet submerged by Han Chinese culture. Chinese scholars think that control over Tawang is essential for China 'to win the hearts of the Tibetans' (Ramachandran 2009). However, in Tawang, the China factor is of little significance among local tribes, such as the Monpas. During my field trip, I interacted with the people there (mostly Buddhists) who feel that they are certainly part of India. People are gentle and religion plays a very vital role in their day-to-day lives. The monastery is the fountainhead of the spiritual life and centre of all religious activities. However for the people there, the major challenge is livelihood but not China threat. This difficult

terrain is faced with several hardships like livelihood, transportation, connectivity, health and also education issues. The government school started here only in the year 1992, with very high dropout rates. So it is the basic necessities with which people of Tawang are still struggling. While looking at people's perception, Namrata Goswami found that the local people and tribes in Tawang think that, the Chinese claim is not validated by history. Her interaction with monastery people found that Tawang monastery has a historical link with Lhasa, having religious, educational, barter trade and exchange of religious documents, without having any political or administrative connection, but never had any link with China. Therefore, the Chinese claim for Arunachal Pradesh is not valid. But Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang in the year 2009 created anxieties, and certain groups of people feared Chinese aggression, reminiscent of 1962 (Goswami 2011). Therefore, the 'China threat' is not a major challenge to the people of Tawang, rather they are much willing to be a part of Indian democracy, and their expectation from this democracy is primarily to have access to the basic amenities of life, like health, education, power, water, road and infrastructure. But this small yet strategic place also needs a very sound border security.

[Plate 2.7](#) Tawang Monastery looking over the city of Tawang



So the state needs very rapid development on connectivity and economic progress, which only can reassure the confidence of the people living here. However, Tawang's strategic importance cannot be ruled out. The place is the shortest route from Tibet into India (Wasim 2010: 95). For China, therefore, Tawang is not simply the Tawang Monastery, it means the whole of Arunachal Pradesh, whose strategic importance becomes even higher for the following reasons.

- (a) It provides strategic depth to India's Brahmaputra Valley and India's other Northeastern states.
- (b) The state also provides security to Bhutan on its entire eastern flank by geographical contiguity.
- (c) Arunachal Pradesh, therefore, is a vital strategic location for territorial integrity and defence of India's Northeastern states (ibid.: 77).

However, in recent times China has intensified its focus on Arunachal Pradesh and the PLA sometimes crosses the LAC in the eastern sector more frequently than ever. In northern part of Arunachal Pradesh, the PLA is not even allowing the locals to cross the Dichu River, that marks the border between India and China to enter India for trade, a centuries old tradition (Gupta 2011). The other Chinese gestures like its vehement reaction and dissatisfaction on Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, especially to Tawang on 10 November 2009 for his religious discourse and China's strong attempt to block an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan worth of USD 2.9 billion, which included funding for USD 60 million for flood management, water supply and sanitation project in Arunachal Pradesh, which according to them is in 'disputed territory'. When the ADB subsequently approved the loan to India, the Chinese foreign office expressed its 'strong dissatisfaction to the move'. India needs to understand that the Chinese have been strengthening their military infrastructure along the border and establishing a network of road, rail, and air links in the region. India has recently begun to reinforce its own claims in the border areas that are in dispute with China. New Delhi is augmenting forces in the eastern sector along the border of Arunachal Pradesh. It also re-deployed elements of its 27th Mountain Division from Jammu and Kashmir to the 30-km-wide Siliguri corridor at the intersection of India, Tibet and Bhutan that links India with the rest of its

Northeastern states. The area, referred to as the Chicken Neck, is a vulnerable point of the border — losing control of it would separate India from its entire Northeast Region. The Indian army is also planning to raise a new mountain strike corps for Arunachal Pradesh. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Arunachal Pradesh in late January 2008 and announced development plans for the region, including construction of a highway connecting the controversial Tawang district with the city of Mahadevpur, underlining India's non-negotiable stance on maintaining Tawang within its boundaries (Wasim 2010: 267). Krishnan Srinivasan thus plotting the faultlines such as India–China boundary dispute in Arunachal Pradesh, suggests adjustments in unpopulated areas with possible conversion of LAC into a boundary which facilitates trade and cultural exchanges for Tibetans to resolve the boundary dispute (Srinivasan 2013: 15–19). However the attempts to prevent border disputes between the two nations still are continuous processes through various joint mechanisms. The recent bilateral dialogue on annual defence has made it clear that while the resolution of the boundary dispute 'would take time', but the two armies would ensure 'peace and tranquillity' along the Line of Actual Control (Pandit 2011). But despite such assurance, the India–China frontier has been more hostile than India–Pakistan border. This is one of the most continuously negotiated borders, which has become the most intractable dispute in modern history (Wasim 2010: 278).

Issue of Water Security

Another issue on which Northeast India needs a caution from China is on water security, the other most vital and emerging issue of non-traditional security threats. The melting glacier in the Himalayas, according to Ryan Hodum, due to increased global climatic change has the potential to affect the water supply of various rivers, which directly makes an impact on scarcity of water, threats on agrarian livelihood and increasing intensity of floods. Such a situation has the likelihood to bring the relations of transborder nations, who share such transboundary river system to a new level of anxiety (Hodum 2007). A report highlights that such Himalayan River Basin in Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal is the home to about 1.3 billion people — nearly 20 percent of the world's population and almost half of the total population in all of these countries. Over the next two decades, annual per capita water availability in the basin will decline by 13–35 per cent, causing severe water scarcity (*Strategic Foresight Group* 2010).

Looking at China's spectacular economic growth over the past two decades, which has extensively depleted the country's natural resources, created a pressure on the supply side and has brought in various new demands for these resources. One such pressure is its increasing demand for energy consumption, which has made it to explore various means to increase its reserve and supply. Thus, its various means to increase and reserve the water energy cutting across the territorial boundaries have become a cause of concern, especially to India's Northeast, which share trans border river system with China. So, as narrated by Amit Ranjan, the mighty Brahmaputra, known as the Tsangpo in China, is a transboundary river flowing into China, India and Bangladesh. It originates in the Jima Yangzong glacier near Mount Kailash in Tibet where it is called the Tsangpo Yarlung, enters into Arunachal Pradesh, where it is called the Dihang, then flows to Assam, a very small part of West Bengal, and finally enters Bangladesh. He argues that any regulation and control of water flows from Tibet to India greatly can favour China's energy strategy. China through its water policy can, therefore, fulfil its increasing water demands by diverting resources from Tibet, and bring a threat to India's growth along with a great damage to its Northeast region. At least two potential projects which the Chinese are in

the process of building on the Tsangpo have deep consequences for northeastern India's water supply. One is a 540 megawatt (MW), run-of-the-river dam on the great bend of the Tsangpo in eastern Tibet near Mt Namcha Barwa, where it turns south to enter India. It is expected to be the world's biggest hydroelectric dam, generating 38,000 MW of energy — twice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam. The second is to the east of Lhasa at a place called Shoumatan. Both of these dams as projected would be multipurpose ones capable of regulating Brahmaputra River flows according to China's needs. Besides producing electricity the dam would also divert water to China's southwest, which requires water for drinking and agricultural activities (Ranjan 2010). Such water diversion has already become a source of tension between these two giant neighbours for quite sometimes now. And China's persistent attempts to divert water resources from the Brahmaputra River, which is the heart-line of Northeast India, has presently the high potentials to compound the security threats, which already has remained tensed since 1962 border war. According to a study by Hodum, in the year 2000, India has expressed its concern over China for not sharing hydrological data on the flow of the Brahmaputra River through the Chinese territory resulting in widespread devastation and floods, where at least 40 people died. A Memorandum of Understanding was then signed in 2002 to co-ordinate data sharing pertaining to water level, discharge, rainfall and the plan to divert the river Brahmaputra with the Indian Water Ministry. The concerns over plans to divert the Brahmaputra River were based on two crucial components of such diversion scheme, that is, the construction of the world's largest hydroelectric plant on the Great Bend of the river on the Tibetan plateau; and the diversion of the waters northward across hundreds of kilometres to China's northwestern provinces. In the early part of the year 2003, Chinese scientists have made a feasibility study for a major hydropower project along the section of the Brahmaputra River which flows through China. This section of the river, which later flows into India and Bangladesh, is calculated to have a water energy reserve of about 68 million kilowatt (KW), or 1/10th of the national total. Such a project can divert 200 billion cubic metres of water annually to the Yellow River. If China is successful in constructing this dam on the river Brahmaputra, it can be highly beneficial for them, but the effects on India's Northeast and also on Bangladesh can be devastating, where roughly 60 per cent of the total water

flow can fall drastically, which provides the base for agrarian life in this region (Hodum 2007). Also diverting the water of river Brahmaputra through such plans to make mega dams might cause a serious environmental damage to India's Northeast in the coming years. Looking at such a precarious water security scenario, both Indian and Chinese governments have agreed in the year 2006 to establish an Expert Level Mechanism to discuss transborder river issues in an institutional way and in the meetings, the Chinese side has categorically denied any such plan and action to build any such large scale diversion project on the Brahmaputra river (Wasim 2010: 267). But China's dire water circumstances, combined with its impressive economic strength, military power, and uniquely advantageous upper riparian position, give us little reason for optimism when it comes to river sharing agreements with lower riparian countries. There are today no formal agreements at all between China and India in regard to water sharing of the transboundary Brahmaputra; and one should not expect any grand cooperative interstate scheme to develop any time soon in regard to that river. On the contrary, mounting tensions and at least verbal skirmishing between China and India over the Brahmaputra's contested waters seem more likely. There will surely be water woes impacting their relationship, in other words, even if water wars never materialised. But analysts across the world increasingly have their eyes on the Brahmaputra River, a transboundary watercourse with headwaters in the Tibetan Plateau of the Himalayan mountain range. The three riparian states sharing the Brahmaputra River — China, India and Bangladesh — are the world's first, second, and seventh most populous countries. All three face severe problems of water scarcity. All three also face steeply rising demand for power generation. The possibility of serious resource conflict involving these demographic giants stems from plans, some already being implemented, to put the river's thus-far relatively unexploited waters to greater use (Defence Forum India 2012). As cautioned by Brahma Chellaney such disputes in water resources can become a very major potential ground for conflicts, tension and security concerns in this region. He thinks that such rise in 'hydro-hegemon' of China probably has no modern historical parallel (Chellaney 2011). Some even have gone so far to say that this move qualifies as an act of war. So the Northeast frontier, which is already

wounded and disturbed by several security threats from China since 1962, has now added with another fresh threat of water security from China.

WAY FORWARD: NEGOTIATING BORDERS THROUGH ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

However way back in 1988, the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China to open a new chapter of détente. Over the next decade, both nations sought to enhance political and military dialogue and build comprehensive ties in order to create the conditions for a fair boundary settlement. Thus, both in the 1993 and 1996 agreements, peace, tranquility and confidence building measures were result of this effort, though dispute at boundary area never achieved any solution (Wasim 2010: 274). Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in 2003, made another attempt to move beyond Nehru's peaceful coexistence of the Panchsheel Act to 'mutual sensitivity to the concerns of each other' and 'respect for equality'. Since then both the nations moved forward, especially in the economic front, and attempted to gain positively. Consequently, India–China bilateral trade eventually jumped from USD 200 million in 1988 to USD 61 billion in 2010, and both countries have further agreed to stay committed to deepening their economic ties based on pragmatic co-operation. Also trade and economic ties have helped India and China to take their political–military relationships out of woods beginning with the late 1980s and actually has enabled them to keep sweeping tensions under the friendship rug (Singh 2011). India needs to look at the positivity of the Chinese regime, which made tremendous efforts to transform country's social sector and its expansive economy, so India possibly needs to explore more opportunities rather than looking at China factor always with suspicion. It is equally important to understand the public sentiments of both sides across the border, national dignity and lives of border residents, which need to be prioritised above political and strategic interests. India has made several bilateral economic engagements with China but comparatively less emphasis was put to solve border issues. It is, therefore, important for the country now to find out the most viable options to create economic and development engagements with China, so that both nations can move forward with positive gains, having this region of Northeast India and Southwest China and Tibetan territory as a trans-

regional economic hub. The shift from a 'China threat' to 'China opportunity' theory can possibly open the other alternatives to explore the benefits that can be drawn from the gigantic China market, which in the long run again can lead to deeper and inner national and spiritual bonds with China (Wasim 2010: 162). Economic changes in Tibet also have attracted world's attention in recent years, as China is trying to bring this area in the development paradigm through various connectivity networks. These changes can provide various scopes to explore the opportunities available to expand trade. This will have a huge impact on Indian economy in the long run, especially in the backward border regions of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim (Elumalai 2009: 55).

Thus, 60 years after a formal engagement through the Panchsheel Act and more than 50 years after the 1962-border war, India now needs to revisit its relations with China with more innovation and novel approaches, which can turn the Northeast region's perpetual anxiety to amity. India's strategy, as a result, needs to be focused more on trying to improve the border disputes through border engagement through better economic diplomacy and ties. This shift in strategy can eventually bring trust and people-to-people contacts. China is no less interested, since its southwestern part, which is closer to India's Northeast is comparatively underdeveloped and needs a revival and resurgence. Therefore, any development approach along with viable economic ties with Northeast India will be acceptable for China, which incorporates its southwestern province. One such viable option is the re-opening of the Stilwell Road, which connects the Yunnan Province of China, Northeast India and Myanmar and perhaps can usher a ray of hope for prosperity. However as pointed out by Singh, the opening of this route has been a painful process. Until recently this idea of re-opening Stilwell Road was blocked by mutual political differences and security concerns of India, China and Myanmar. In recent years, Myanmar has finally agreed to open the road and awarded the road building contract to a Chinese company. This re-opening would cut 30 per cent transport cost between India and China through Northeast corridor. This will boost India and China overland trade in coming years. The two connecting lands that is, India's Northeast and China's Yunnan are isolated, economically backward and landlocked, and the trade through Stilwell Road will encourage economic development to these two regions, though many hurdles needs to be passed before Stilwell

could become a reality, more so if it needs access to Chittagong port that comes under Bangladesh (Singh 2011). Most importantly this route will connect the other volatile neighbour of Northeast India which is Myanmar, which also has remained a threat to region's security for a very long time. So a well-defined domestic development policy along with a careful border policy of Northeast India, more specifically for the state of Arunachal Pradesh can be a major driver. This can also offer an opportunity to build future economic relations with China, involving its other volatile neighbour Myanmar as well.

3

‘Myanmar Situation’ and India’s Northeast

INDIA–MYANMAR TIES: BORDERLAND PERSPECTIVE

India’s relation with Burma (Myanmar) goes back to the fifth century CE. The countries have since then had close and intimate contacts and connections in the realms of trade, commerce, religion, law, political philosophy and culture (Aung and Myint 2001). Across the open border and through the Patkai range of mountains of India’s Northeast and Burma, there were free movements of people, products, ideas, culture and religion. So along with ethnic and cultural affinities, as argued by Sanjib Baruah (2004), the pre-British economic link also existed through trade between Northeast India and its neighbours like Tibet, Bhutan, Burma, and China, and even had a southern trail of the historic silk route. As observed by Bhattacharya, Northeastern region was most open to the influences emerging from countries like Myanmar (Burma), Thailand (Old Siam) and Cambodia, where Buddhism dominated in such openness. People across this region also had wide range of ethnic affiliations, linguistic groupings along such religious sects. For example, she cited the case of Khamti community of Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They are the direct descendants from the Buddhist Shans of Upper Burma, and who joined their predecessors, the Ahoms of Assam, who are of Tai-Shan origin and ruled the Brahmaputra Valley for six centuries from about 1228 to 1826 CE. The major reasons, as she pointed, out for such migration from Burma to this frontier region of India over such long period of time were searching for better life and to avoid several natural disasters in their own country (Bhattacharya [Chakraborty] 2008: 309–29). Thus, over centuries, this meandering natural route served for many hazardous journeys of several communities, which improved connectivity across the region. Assamese chronicles, according to Nath, bear the testimony to the use of this route in the past by the Buddhist

and Hindu missionaries for visiting countries across the borders and also by the immigrant groups entering Brahmaputra Valley from China and Myanmar. Tai Ahom is one such prominent migrant group, who crossed Patkai Hills and entered Brahmaputra valley during the early part of 13th century to rule Assam for long six centuries till the beginning of the 19th century, till the time it was swept over by the British in the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) (Nath 2004: 1). While looking at the other view on religious connection between the two nations, Thin Thin Aung and Soe Myint go back even earlier and argue that, both Hinduism and Buddhism arrived Burma from India by the seventh century. Along with religion, as they further point out, that Burma received the foundation of its legal system from India; the earliest law book in Burma named 'the Wagaru Dhammathat' of India, which in Burmese is known as 'Manusara Shwemin'. Also, linguistically, Pali, which originated from India, was the source of many Burmese words. Coming to the trade relations, they mention that the two countries started trade from ancient times, and Indian traders established permanent settlements along the coast of Burma. Even politically, the connection between India and Burma began much before the British conquest. The Arakanese Kings had close contact with India in the 14th century. Burmese king Bayinnaung (1550–81) attacked and subdued the present day Manipur of Northeast India (Aung and Myint 2001). Thus, despite religious, trade and other connections, the Burmese military influence and their regular attacks and raids during that period across the hills and valleys of Assam and Manipur of this frontier area during the pre-British period had disrupted and destabilised the region to a large extent. As pointed out by Baruah, the expanding Burmese empire towards the end of 18th century had began to intervene in the internal affairs of Ahom, Manipuri and other small kingdoms in Northeast India. While in 1822 the Ahom kingdom came to be ruled by Burmese commander, the aristocracy escaped to British territories and sought British help against such Burmese invaders (Baruah 1999: 21). Therefore, despite having centuries old relations, India's Northeast borderland at one point needed a desperate help and intervention to protect it from such regular Burmese attacks. British political intervention, military skills and border redrawing in the 19th century had saved the region from such frequent Burmese attacks, and had reshaped region's history in years to come. Echoing Sukanya Sharma,

regular wars in this frontier had made the whole region unstable. The Burmese frequently conducted raids in the region. The kingdom of Ava, for instance, regularly conducted raids in different parts of Northeast India and almost every major ruler of this region had to pay an annual tribute to the more powerful king of Ava in the beginning of 19th century. Finally, the British entered into the scene in 1824 to restore stability in the region by driving out the Burmese. The boundary was drawn with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo between the King of Ava and the British administration. The treaty was signed after a series of three wars between the signatories, and eventually Assam was freed. The king of Ava formally renounced his claim upon the principality of Assam and its dependencies and on the neighbouring states of Cachar, Jaintia and Manipur, thus the whole of Northeast came under British administration. They maintained a strong army contingent and a civilian authority under a political agent at Sadiya, a small town in the remote Northeast corner of Assam and which is very near to Indo-China and Indo-Burma borders (Sharma 2005). Thus, with the passing of political power to British hands from Ahom kingdom, the Assamese heartland became politically incorporated to pan-Indian imperial formation (Baruah 1999: 21). Ever since, the natural connectivity across the border of both Burma and Northeast India was disrupted, cross-border ethnic affinities and their roots were divided, and both had to come under British administration for next several decades. Burma then became a strategic neighbour for British India and was perceived solely for British interests. In the words of Thin Thin Aung and Soe Myint (2001) with the British occupation the two countries became a part of British Empire. Burma was ruled by the British as a part of British India till 1937. The British for their own economic and other administrative interests brought a number of Indians to Burma during its rule. There was no department of the public services, police, military or civil, without Indians in British Burma. For 10 years following 1885, around 18,000 Indian soldiers were stationed in Burma, and the Rangoon police was entirely dominated by the Indian Police. The estimates say that on the morning of independence on 4 January 1948, there were some 300,000–400,000 Indians living in independent Burma (Aung and Myint 2001). Thus, on one hand, for British administrative purposes, they brought the people of mainstream India to Burma who served their interests, and on the other hand for their strategic purposes, the same

British rulers have divided the people of borderland India by creating boundaries across India's Northeast frontier and Burma. Such policies of the imperialists later have affected extensively the lives and identity of both mainstream Indians in Burma and borderland ethnic groups in India. The British administration had used both these colonies of Burma and India for their own administrative purposes and for extractive economic policies, having strategic interests, and thus distorted heavily the age-old natural trade flows and their ethnic connections. Such apathetic British policies on both lands had given birth to many severe problems in the borderlands of both the nations. On the other hand, the same British policies, had also created space for the people and leaders of both India and Burma to co-operate in their common struggle for independence and later to resolve the unsettled issues through friendship, understanding and bilateral co-operation.

POST-COLONIAL TIES

The association of the two countries under British rule created a common understanding and they co-operated in their common struggle for independence. Such mutual understanding between the two nations continued even after their independence from British imperialist. The countries supported each other's independence struggle and their leaders developed a deep rooted friendship between them. As noted by Aung and Myint, when the Burmese national leader Aung San and his six other colleagues were assassinated on 19 July 1947 in Burma, Indian national leader Jawaharlal Nehru issued a statement in which he mourned for Aung San and his comrades. Nehru mentioned that Burma 'has lost one of her bravest and most far-seeing sons', and he informed the people of Burma that India would 'stand by them in the difficult days ahead'. Also on the eve of the independence of India and Burma the two countries grew closer. Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then President of the Constituent Assembly of India, declared at a meeting of Rangoon citizens on 5 January 1948, 'Free Burma could always count on India's assistance and services whenever she needed them' (Aung and Myint 2001).

While working together for better neighbourly relations after independence, along with safeguarding the national security and development, both India and Burma at Bandung Conference in 1954,

formulated five principles of peaceful co-existence, which formed as the core of their foreign policies of these two emerging sovereign nation-states (Sakhong 2010):

- (a) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- (b) Mutual non-aggression;
- (c) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
- (d) Equality and mutual benefit;
- (e) Peaceful co-existence.

On the basis of such formulation, both the nations have been trying to maintain their bilateral relations having the pivotal areas as,

- (a) Security and insurgency issues of India's borderland Northeast, and the Chinese influence in Burma;
- (b) Economic co-operation with trade promotion and other constructive engagements with emphasis on borderland;
- (c) Presence of many Indian origins in Burma and their status since British period.

Borderland perspective has remained one of the dominant issues in the relationship between the two neighbours for the last six decades since Independence as they share the 1,643-km long boundary. This administrative boundary was drawn by the British government, which unfortunately has divided the homelands of many ethnic groups in the region, such as the Chin, Kachin, Naga, and some more. These ethnic communities, who co-existed peacefully across the two nations for years together, became separated by the boundaries drawn by the British administration, and subsequently their voices and demands were sub-merged in larger national interests even after independence. Both during colonial and post-colonial times, the demands and issues of these frontier people were sidelined and no meaningful solution was ever evolved for these divided people of same race and community. Meanwhile, the borderland became perpetually unstable and disturbed due to the unmet demands of such ethnic groups for their homelands and their subsequent fights for secession and independence. Naga Nationalist movement, thus, has become one of the oldest armed struggle movements in the world, whose demands are still unfulfilled. As pointed out

by Sakhong, during 1937, when the Burma Act of 1935 was officially implemented and Burma was separated from the Province of India, Sir Robert Reid, the then Governor of Assam, strongly protested against the policy of the British India government, which had adopted the administrative boundaries of the homelands of Chin, Kachin and Naga as the boundary between Burma and India, and later between India and Bangladesh as well. He apprehended that this separation of Burma from India on lines of the frontiers would permanently divide the people of the border like Chin, Kachin and Naga, which naturally should comprise a single unit (Sakhong 2010). Sushil Pillai (2001) also is of the opinion that the Indo-Burmese border redrawn by the British amongst themselves for administrative purposes, divided many ethnic communities. It has divided the Zos (including Indian Mizos), the Nagas, Kukis, Anals, Jingphos, Konyaks, and other minor tribes. However, free movement of indigenous tribes living within a 20 km belt on either side of the Indo-Burma border was permitted for a long time. Such artificial delineation of the borders was one of the major factors that led to the newly independent states of India and Burma reaping a harvest of insurgencies since 1947–48 (Pillai 2001). Such ethnic groups of both the lands, who expected a better and rational approach from both the colonial and post colonial rulers for their status and identity across the border, eventually started their right to secession movements when their expectations were not met. Over the years, the ramification of such movements has been in terms of insurgency operations of many such ethnic groups across India's Northeast and in Myanmar. Such movements then became sensitive security issues across the Indo-Myanmar border, which also extensively damaged the development and economic prosperity in this border region of Northeast India and Burma. As mentioned by Sakhong, amongst all ethnic communities, Nagas in Burma and Chins in India were most sidelined during independence. However, he points out that Nagas in India were capable of negotiating their future status, and in 1947, Naga National Council headed by A. Z. Phizo went to New Delhi and submitted a memorandum asserting right to self-determination and amending the setting up of an Interim Government of the Naga people for a period of 10 years. Though the 'Naga–Akbar–Hydari Accord' was signed, but Phizo declared Naga independence on 14 August 1947 and eventually a full-fledged war broke out between the Nagas and the Indian government (Sakhong 2010).

Since then, this armed struggle movement for the demand for greater Nagaland has been going on, which includes Nagas from Nagaland, and from other states of Northeast India and also Nagas across the border from Myanmar. Thus, as a result of boundary redrawing, the divided people of ethnic community and their demand for reunion and separate homeland becomes apparent in this frontier region of India. Many such ethnic groups including Tai community are subsequently now aspiring for political rights in both Northeast India and in Myanmar, whose destiny was re-written during the colonial period.

Looking at such ethnicity-related movements, which over time have been turning into several insurgency operations in this region, Aung and Myint points out that on 10 March 1967, India and Burma signed the boundary agreement to formally delimitate and demarcate the entire boundary between the two countries. Both governments then ratified the Agreement and the Instruments of Ratification were exchanged in New Delhi on 30 May 1967. Thus, eventually most of the 1,643 km-long border between the two nations was demarcated by the leaders of Joint Boundary Commission in New Delhi. There was one disagreement on the Moreh point, which Burmese government claimed and then later solved by mutual discussion, and another demarcation, which still remains incomplete, is the tri-junction of India, China and Burma at Diphir near Rima at the eastern tip of the McMahon line (Aung and Myint 2001). This agreement was needed as the insurgency issues have already surfaced across the borderlands of Northeast India amongst the ethnic communities such as Nagas and Mizos. On the other hand, the Burmese army had stepped up its military campaigns along the border of the country, including on the Indo-Burmese border. There were waves of refugee exodus from Burma to neighbouring countries as a result of these military campaigns. In particular, hundreds of Naga refugees fled to Nagaland in India even much later in the beginning of 1992. India protested over this Naga refugee issue and asked the Burmese government to stop atrocities on innocent villagers on the border. Later, India and Burma worked together for the repatriation of these Naga refugees to Burma. There were cases when Burmese army personnel crossed the Indian border in pursuit of the Burmese rebels. When the Burmese government started paying attention to Kachin insurgents on the Indo-Burmese border, an unwritten understanding developed between the authorities of the two countries, troops

from either side could cross the border to a certain limit in pursuit of the insurgents. Along with such development, India around the 1970s sincerely realised that it needed a friendly relationship with the Government of Burma to contain its own insurgency problem in Northeast India, as some of these groups established their camps within Burma (Aung and Myint 2001). It is, therefore, time again to re-visit the situations in Myanmar in the contemporary period and their implications in terms of security and development in India's Northeast. It is also important to see, whether boundary agreement has helped to deal with the issue of security concerns in Northeast India, having both ethnic insurgency aspect and other non-traditional security aspects; and whether any further development could be made in the region along with the neighbouring nation Myanmar to resolve these issues. To assess such issues, the chapter focuses on one of the bordering areas between India and Myanmar to see the level of activities and connectivity that prevail in the borderlands. And secondly, it focuses on the internal situations in Myanmar, which have impacts and implications on security and development in the border region of the Northeast India.

BLURRING THE BORDER AND BEYOND TRADE

Northeast India's relation and connectivity with Myanmar across the border cannot possibly be understood only in terms of border trade and exchanges, rather it goes much beyond this. The long border, which has been drawn by the British administration actually blurs as so many ethnic communities are breeding the same genealogy and have similar culture, food habits and other connections along this porous border. One such porous border is the Moreh–Tamu area of Manipur and Myanmar, which is being crossed by several hundred people everyday, who simply walk across the same street to exchange goods and services. As pointed out by Singh and Singh (2011),

[B]efore signing the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement, there was traditional exchange of goods between the people living along both sides of the border. The Kachins in Myanmar-China border, the Karens in Myanmar-Thailand border, the Rohingyas in Myanmar-Bangladesh and the Tamil chettiars and Nagas and the Kuki, Chin and Mizo in India-Myanmar border have been carrying on border trade. It

was mainly because of this fact that the hill tribals inhabiting the border areas along the India-Myanmar border enjoyed the facility of free movement up to 40 kms. on either side on the entire length of 1643 kms., as they have close affinity, along with cultural and economic ties. They enjoyed this facility until 1968 when Government of India introduced a permit system unilaterally to check entry of undesirable elements and insurgents.

In Mizoram, the other border state with Myanmar, several ethnic communities cross the border from Myanmar side and look for livelihood opportunities in Mizoram. Thus, domestic help, and other petty works, like weaving and small trades and some times teaching are taken up by the people who cross the border from Myanmar. Sources have said at least 50,000 Myanmarese nationals are staying in Mizoram creating a demographic nightmare for this small state having a population of about only 10 lakh (*The Times of India* 2011). Thus, the history of cross border connectivity along with trade and exchange with Myanmar through India's Northeast boundaries is an old one and goes beyond the colonial and post colonial legacies. In the words of Bhattacharjee, 'cross country trade in the North East Frontier is a compulsion of geography and a fact of history and without this, the economy of the region can not stand on its own feet' (Bhattacharjee 2002). It, therefore, goes without saying if contemporary Indo-Myanmar relation improves, their age-old border relations also would get a boost, and so as the border trade and other connections. Such improved border relations and understanding would in all speculations bring about greater geo-economic security and prosperity to the people of Northeast India as well as to the people of Myanmar. This enhanced economic security can possibly counter the age-old cross-border security scenario, which relates to ethno-insurgency operations and illegal border trade on several items like drugs and small arms and can improve the life and culture of the borderlands. There are attempts from both the nations. For example, the Government of India formally entered into a border trade agreement with the government of Myanmar as signed on 21 January 1994 to formalise the Indo-Myanmar border trade, in the first phase of India's 'Look East' policy, and the options have gone through such border trade activities, which are carried out at points of Moreh and Tamu, the twin towns of India's Manipur

and Myanmar. The agreement of two governments, as pointed out by M. P. Bezbaruah, specified that trade should be conducted through the designated custom posts, that is, (a) Moreh in India (Manipur) and Tamu in Myanmar, (b) Champhai in India (Mizoram) and Rhi in Myanmar and (c) other places that may be notified by mutual agreement between the two countries. Following the signing of the agreement the two LCS at Moreh and Champhai on Indian soil were notified. However, the Champhai station has not become functional till date and all official or formal Indo-Myanmar border trade has been taking place through the Moreh–Tamu route (Bezbaruah 2007). The agreement initially provided for cross-border trade with 22 items, mostly with agricultural and other primary products produced in the trading countries. In 2001, more items were added to the list of tradable items. Thus, with this formalised border trade policy with 40 permissible items at 5 per cent duty, the region was expected to boost its trade. But in practice, as observed by Bezbaruah, the agreement actually does not go much beyond according a formal sanction to exchanges traditionally going on between the local populations in the border areas of the two countries. But it holds significant symbolic value in terms of furthering economic ties between the two countries. Immediately, after such agreement, the formal trade volume has increased manifolds across the Moreh–Tamu sector. From about INR 15 crore in 1995–96, the trade volume reached INR 46.49 crore and INR 62.39 crore in 1996–97 and 1997–98, respectively. But in the following year the volume fell sharply, as the restriction was imposed by Myanmar authorities that exports from India should precede imports from Myanmar with effect from 26 November 1997. In the following years though there has been some recovery, the trade volume has not revived to anywhere near the levels of 1996–97 and 1997–98 (Bezbaruah 2007). In the first decade of the 21st century, border trade actually has gone down to INR 4.16 crore in 2010–11 from INR 8.82 crore in 2006–7. Thus, as against the import–export Indo-Myanmar trade share of 76 per cent and 116 per cent for the decade 2000, the Northeastern Region (NER) shares were merely 2.08 per cent and 0.49 per cent, respectively. Thus, in the perspective of total volume of Indo-Myanmar international trade, such formal border trade across these two neighbours, primarily through the twin towns of Moreh and Tamu is insignificant. As percentage of combined domestic income of the eight states of the NER also, this border

trade is virtually negligible and the region has collected net revenue worth of only about INR 293.5 million in 2010–11 from 20 LCS of Northeast India.

Formal border trade, thus, across these two twin towns is yet to make any significant break through, despite the fact that people in these two border towns walk along a street and are involved more intensely in informal trade and exchange, which goes beyond the notified 22 items on agricultural and primary products. Trade and exchange culture across these two towns, therefore, goes beyond formal trade, and people of many communities have been surviving here mostly on intense informal trading activities. As there is hardly any border between the two nations here, people from the Indian side simply can cross this porous border by passing Gate Number 2 on payment of INR 10 to the small police outpost that separates the Indian and Myanmar sides. No other official documents or passport is necessary to cross the border. During my field trip in April 2011, this 109-km long journey from Imphal to Moreh had taken me around four hours. The Imphal–Moreh National Highway 39 is heavily guarded by Indian armed forces, especially the Assam Rifles Regiment. There are eight to nine security checkpoints and in each check post, the car was stopped and several inquiries were made about the trip. The road and infrastructure on the Indian side is not at all satisfactory. Along this road the villages are mostly dominated by the Kuki ethnic community of Manipur, therefore the trade, especially illegal trade is essentially dominated by this community only. There is a large section of Manipuri Muslims in this area. All these small villages are surrounded and guarded by many army camps to control the communal disharmony. Villages like Pallen and Chandel, which fall on the way to Moreh were heavily occupied by the underground militants, but recently with the strong intervention of armed forces, their operation and occupation has come down, and Moreh road has become much safer today.

Plate 3.1 Entering Moreh from Imphal Town



Moreh is a small underdeveloped border town of Manipur. Though strategically very important, as it is adjacent to Myanmar, but one can see that, it is most neglected in terms of infrastructure and development. Business is the main occupation here with a population of around 20,000 comprising Kukis, Tamilians, Biharis, and other locals like the Meiteis are also doing trade here. Many mainstream Indians like Tamil Chettiars have fled Burma after the Second World War and settled down in this small Indian town Moreh to do trade with the other side. Indian-origin Myanmarese settlers also contribute through trade to the growth of Moreh town. There are around 5,000 Kukis, 3000 Meiteis and 4,000 Tamils and some other communities in this border town. They have reasonably fair understanding with the people across the border and earn their livelihood through trade and exchange. But once I crossed the border through Gate Number 2 and entered into the border town Namphalong of Myanmar, I found a sharp contrast in

terms of trade and infrastructure development. Namphalong has a thriving trade business, where thousands of Myanmarese are involved and depend heavily on Indian customers and consumers, who cross the border everyday for purchase of goods. For the Indians, especially the people of Manipur, it is the most favoured destination for shopping, where varieties of goods are available in a much reasonable price. Indians cross the border to purchase almost all household items along with other primary products. Moreh market, on the contrary, does not have so many customers, and looks quite empty and dull compared to Namphalong market. But there are many Myanmarese customers who prefer to buy automobile parts, bikes, bicycles, other machineries and medicines from Moreh market, as they are expensive in their own country.

Namphalong market on the Myanmar border sells everything from perishable goods and electronics items to consumer durables to the Indian customers. These items are beyond the list of formal border trade agreement between India and Myanmar. People prefer to buy several imported goods, which primarily come from China, in the Namphalong market at a cheaper rate. Thus, a major volume of trade is now based in Namphalong town, not even in Tamu, which is little far off and where the prices are much higher. So the goods from Thailand, Korea, Singapore, and China along with Burmese goods reach Namphalong market for day-to-day trade. A huge volume of trade goes on with food items, like vegetables, fruits, fresh fish and dry fish, spices, sticky rice, consumer durables, Burmese teak, electronics, and alcohol. Vendors in Namphalong market prefer the Indian currency to the Myanmar Kyat, as the rupee is more stable. Thus, INR 1 is equivalent to 20 Kyats, which fluctuates at times. The Namphalong market's daily turnover is around INR 1 crore. The trading time is from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. everyday. Along such a porous border, trading on drugs and small arms is also very likely.

Plate 3.2 Tamu Market

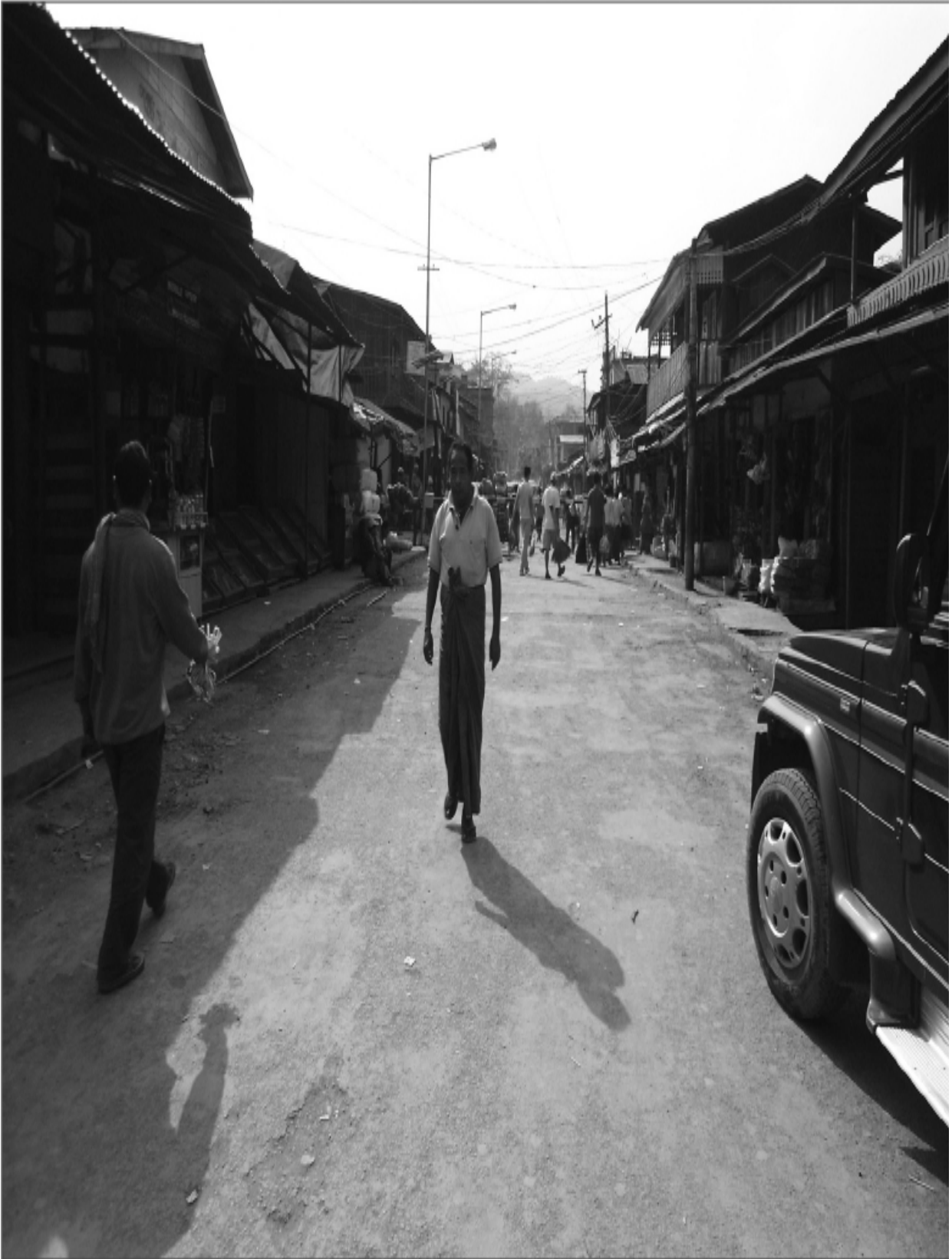


Plate 3.3 Namphalomg Market with Consumer Durables



To understand the situation in Tamu market, I travelled in an auto from Namphalong to the place. Surprisingly, the market, which was once a thriving place, had become quite desolate and the stores and shops were deserted. The youths in Tamu desperately look for earning avenues and livelihood opportunities, as trading is not attractive to them anymore. In Tamu also, the Indian currency is acceptable in the shops, and Indian languages like Hindi and Manipuri are spoken and understood. Bollywood

films are very popular and they prefer to take Indian tourists to many sites in Tamu including the monasteries. There is a floating population that also makes earnings across the border. The Lokchao River near Moreh, flanked by the forests on both the banks, dividing India and Myanmar is barely a border, as people freely cross it.

Plate 3.4 Tamu Market Area



Myanmar's Internal Issues and India's Borderland Challenge

While looking at Myanmar's internal issues, one does not find very stable, developed and peaceful situation. It is a complex, multi-ethnic society with

multiple faultlines. Along with Burmans, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Chinese, Mon, and other ethnic groups, about 135 different groups and races are identified in Myanmar. There are intense inter-ethnic armed conflicts and hostilities that have been going on in the country for a long period of time. After Independence, Burma's internal policies and nationalisation process had taken several steps which went against the non-Burmese population, and against many ethnic groups. Johnson argues that way back in the aftermath of independence from British colony in early 1950s, Burma's (Myanmar) economy grew rapidly due to an increasing profit from the food prices. But such economic growth did not sustain for long and did not spill over the nation due to an internal conflict against the non-Burman people, who had been controlling nation's economy to a large extent, and they were primarily the trading class. Such conflict also had to disrupt the other sectors like timber trade, oil and mining and the overall economy of the country. To face such economic collapse, the socialist economic programme encouraged a shift towards industrialisation at the cost of agriculture. This made a sharp fall in the prices of rice, which added to economic crisis within the country (Johnson 2006: 65). According to Aung and Myint:

After independence the government of Burma took a number of measures calculated to strengthen the economic interests of Burmese against the foreigners. These measures generally hit Indians, as Indians constituted the biggest section in the foreign population of independent Burma. Among the several acts passed by the Burmese Government in 1948, the Land Alienation Act forbade the sale of land to non-Burmese nationals. The Burma Land Nationalisation Bill, which was passed on 11 October 1949, aroused deep resentment and strong protest among Indians in both Burma and India. However, the friendship between Nehru and U Nu averted any confrontation between the two countries. Nehru felt that the Land Nationalisation Acts of Burma were non-discriminatory, although they mostly affected Indians. But he stood firm that adequate compensation should be paid by Burma, although the agreement that was reached was half-heartedly carried out by Burmese Government (2001: 89).

Neither has the Indian government done much for this community. Aung and Myint also view that the nationalisation measures initiated by the U Nu government affected mostly the Indian chettyars, landlords, and the big financiers. Later again with the Ne Win government of nationalistic economic policy in the early 1964, the country had nationalised the shops and stores, which had the small traders. The Indians again were the hardest hit by Ne Win's nationalisation measures. An estimate made by the Burma Displaced Persons Association showed that over 12,000 Indian concerns with assets worth INR 15 crore were affected. The latest nationalisation measure was so vigorous that many Indians were deprived of their means of livelihood and no compensation was paid to them at the time of nationalisation. Many of them wanted to go back to India, but was not possible for them as they could not pay their passage and the Government of Burma did not provide even passage facilities to them (Aung and Myint 2001). The destiny of these mainland Indians, whom the British colonials have left behind in Burma became very uncertain. But despite such anti-Indian domestic policy of Burma, India's support and friendship was not affected, and in 1951, the Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two nations at New Delhi for everlasting peace and unalterable friendship between them. But India's relation with Myanmar was affected only in the early 1960s, when Myanmar developed a pro-China policy. The trade and economic relations between India and Myanmar deteriorated as China became the major importer of Burmese rice at that period. Later, in 1988, India's relationship with Myanmar came to a standstill, for a long period, as India extended its support to the pro-democratic movements in the nation. However, in the early 1990s, India's foreign policy towards Southeast Asian countries reflected Myanmar once again as a prominent neighbour from all perspectives of political, economic, security and strategic. Border issues re-surfaced as the prominent area, and there emerged a paradigm shift to revive the border relations with trade and other constructive economic engagements. New Delhi finds Myanmar as an important land-bridge on its path to the consolidation of ties with Southeast and East Asia. Also, Myanmar's policy towards India is largely based on its desire to diversify its external engagement and to counter the increasing dependence on China by late 1990s (Yhome 2008: 2).

Desire to diversify external engagement needs to go hand in hand with Myanmar's internal economic and political stability. The backward economy of Myanmar often becomes a limitation despite having situational advantage, which is buffer state between the two Asian giants of India and China and also a connecting nation for India and other Southeast Asian nations: 'The Myanmar military regime sought to overcome these domestic challenges as well as international isolation organised by the Western nations by forging closer economic ties with China and opening substantial natural resources for exploitation by its North eastern neighbours' (*EPW* Editorial 2012: 9). Despite such alliance with China, economic imbalance and crisis in Myanmar continued and forced more and more of its people to live below poverty line. Such economic deterioration then prompted military government to make drastic policy reforms and finally transformed to a market-driven economy from socialist command-economy in early the 1990s. Such transition was to make Myanmar economy a more vibrant one, but its internal political vicissitudes have mostly remained a hurdle for economic achievement. Unlike China, the grim realities of military dictatorship, isolation from rest of the world and several economic sanctions from West have restrained the nation to achieve economic success over time. The country, which was once Southeast Asia's richest hub, is now termed by UN as the 'least developed country' in the world. Lack of reliable economic data also restricts one to assess the actual economic situation of the country. For example, the World Development Report 2009 shows 9.2 per cent growth rate of GDP in Myanmar. Being an agriculture-based economy with opportunities being very low in service and manufacturing sectors and a parallel operation of shadow market, it is tough to chase such high growth rate. The realistic estimate for GDP growth as mentioned by Singh would, therefore, be around 6 per cent and not the staggering 9.2 per cent (Singh 2006: 260). According to the CIA World Factbook Reports:

Burma, a resource-rich country, suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, and rural poverty. The junta took steps in the early 1990s to liberalise the economy after decades of failure under the 'Burmese Way to Socialism', but those efforts stalled, and some of the liberalisation measures were rescinded. Despite Burma's increasing oil and gas revenue, socio-economic conditions

have deteriorated due to regime's mismanagement of the economy.
(CIA 2009: 108)

The report further emphasises the lack of monetary and fiscal stability, which has worst affected its economy with severe macroeconomic imbalances — reflecting in rising inflation, fiscal deficits, multiple official exchange rates that overvalue the Burmese kyat, distorted interest rate, unreliable statistics, and an inability to reconcile national accounts to determine a realistic GDP figure. Thus, such tainted economy has worsened the living conditions of millions of Myanmar people, and there had to emerge a strong economic class distinction among its population. The wide economic disparity between the ruling political class and the rest has brought in many conflicts in the country, which were subverted by the ruling class. People tried to migrate to the neighbouring nations to escape such oppressive system and also many ethnic communities in the far-flung areas along with the support of transborder communities started fighting against such government policies. Thus, along with such grim economic policies and realities, several armed movements of various ethnic communities, for a prolonged period of time, within the nation, also damaged its development to a large extent. These movements have been sustaining with persistent illegal economic activities for generating resources. For example, the some of the dangerous armed groups like Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO), Kachin Independent Army (KIA) have been generating their resources by controlling the jade mines of Myanmar and by exploiting other natural resources like forests, for which the country is famous. Apart from these armed groups, the neighbouring player China also is damaging Myanmar's resources to a large extent. As pointed out by Pulipaka (2011) the rampant logging in Myanmar is fuelled by increased demand for forest products from China. The faster pace of economic development in China demanded faster exploitation of natural resources to sustain growth trajectories and has resulted massive deforestation in Myanmar. Thus, Myanmar-China timber trade is on increase (Pulipaka 2011: 199–200). The other significant dimension of Myanmar's damaging economy is the menace of opium and other narcotic drug production and its trading across borders. Over the years, opium producers from regions like Shan state have got integrated to global networks and the illicit money have been used to finance various armed

movements and organisations (ibid.: 202). It is believed that poppy cultivation in Myanmar came from China and it was a legal activity during colonial period and even after the end of the Second World War (Joint Kokang-Wa Humanitarian Needs Assessment Team 2003). Such multi-layered volatility within Myanmar has a spill over effect on India's Northeast region, posing a great challenge to its security concerns and development issues. The bordering areas have hardly developed any official trade and economic linkages, rather illegal trade is going on in full force, where Chinese products along with other items like drugs and arms are dominating the market. Therefore, such an unstable and internally volatile neighbour has remained a perpetual cause of concern in India's borderland for last several decades in terms of both security and development.

‘MYANMAR’ IN NORTHEAST INDIA’S SECURITY PARADIGM

Any attempt of Indo-Myanmar joint bilateral co-operation perhaps would not make any meaning without bringing India's Northeast and its age-old security threats from Myanmar. The Northeastern region of India, which shares 1,643 km long common border with Myanmar, is the worst affected region for many decades due to the persistent threats of ethnic insurgency having cross-border support and for being used as a corridor for drug, narcotics and small arms trafficking. As part of their respective national security interests, K. Yhome says that the bilateral relation between India and Burma has mainly focused on ‘co-operation in combating insurgencies’ along the Indo-Burma border, especially with Chin, Kachin and Naga insurgent groups (Yhome 2008). Sakhong also pointed out that the cross-border ethnic movements of Chin, Kachin and Naga nationalist have always been a major concern for both India and Myanmar. Although the physical movement of the Chin National Liberation was curtailed in 1969, and the Mizo National Front was converted into a normal political party when Mizoram became a full autonomous state in 1987, Kachin and Naga armed-struggles continue to exist. However, in 1980, the NNC split into two factions; Thuengaling Muivah, who was picked up by Phizo for his chief aide in 1966, split away from Phizo's NNC. Together with Isak Swu, Muivah founded the NSCN on the Burma side of Nagaland. The NSCN split into two factions again; NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) (Sakhong 2010). Marie Lall

further argues that, many of insurgency issues in Northeast India are actually related to their cross-border ethnic problems. Thus, as discussed earlier, she also highlights that the tribes like Nagas in the region, who are ethnically linked to the tribes on the Myanmar side of the border, have been demanding greater autonomy and independence through their armed struggle and movements (Lall 2006: 424–46). Such armed struggle and their long sustenance have remained possible primarily due to cross-border support from Myanmar for last several decades. Such cross-border insurgency operations have remained a mutual cause of concern in broader Indo-Myanmar relations. B. Pakem shows such cross-border connectivity and points out that, Naga insurgents under NSCN banner established their headquarters at Sahpa with three sub-divisions in Northern Myanmar, that is, Ukamol, Langcheng and Takti. The Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council of Myanmar was merged in their federal set up in March 1979 thereby strengthening their movement (Pakem 1992: 219). Bhaumik further points out that, western Burma's most powerful rebel group, the KIA also made a close link with Northeast India's NSCN and NNC groups. KIA extended help and training to Naga rebels to reach China in the year 1966; they also trained the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and at least two Manipuri rebel groups. The situation became more complex due to the continued support from Bangladesh and Pakistan. India too has used this strategic frontier to support insurrections in neighbouring nations. Even in 1990s, India cultivated a host of Burmese ethnic armies for preventing aids to Northeast Indians rebel groups and also for preventing the rising influence of China in Myanmar (Bhaumik 2009: 153–54). Due to such transborder insurgency operations, the region suffers from decades old instability. An atmosphere of peaceful and stable relations through trade and other economic exchanges along with ethno-cultural connectivity could never develop and mature between India's Northeast and Myanmar's Northwest, despite the fact that both the nations felt repeatedly the need for a formal agreement to resolve this perpetual issue, so that future development activities and cross-border connectivity can take place. Several independent anti-insurgency operations and measures have been attempted from both sides. For example, as Singh points out that during 1979, the Myanmar security forces had launched an intensive combing operation in and around upper and northern Myanmar, which was followed by another largescale

combing operation against the Karens during 1983 (Singh 2005: 282–83). During late 1980s, Myanmar underwent a historic movement for the restoration of democracy, where several people died and the nation faced international condemnation and various economic sanctions. India supported the movement and remained distanced from Myanmar. Gradually China's influence has increased in Myanmar for trade and other economic engagement. But after a reasonable time gap, again in the 1990s, India started re-visioning its relations with Myanmar. As pointed out by Singh that, two factors prompted India to reassess and renew its policy towards Myanmar, they are China factor and issue of insurgency in Northeast India, operating in both the nations for which joint efforts were essential. During 1989–91, number of government officials from India felt that policy of 'constructive engagement' with the military government of Myanmar was necessary. And during 1992, when the deputy foreign minister of Myanmar visited India, both the nations identified concrete areas of bilateral cooperation along with border trade, prevention of narcotics trafficking and contacts between the civilian and military authorities in the border regions of two nations to prevent illegal activities (ibid.: 288–89). This has further extended to economic and commercial co-operation between the nations. This shift was a part of India's 'Look East' policy of the United Front Government of India. Along with such positive steps, in 1995, the Indian army had launched a joint operation with Myanmar army called 'Operation Golden Bird' against insurgency in Northeast India in Indo-Myanmar border. Bhaumik argues that 'despite occasional hiccups, the Indian and the Burmese armies regularly exchange notes and try to co-ordinate transborder counter-insurgency operations against the rebel groups' (Bhaumik 2009: 177). Once this co-operation is institutionalised, he thinks that it can be effective in controlling transborder insurgency movements. This will help Myanmar push harder to deny rebels from Northeast India a base in Western Myanmar. The security imperative of both countries in their border areas, as K. Yhome (2008) observes, strengthens the military supply relationship between the two countries. In addition to 'military-to-military relations', the improvement of Indo-Burma relations could, in early 1990s be viewed within a broader perspective of the changing dynamic of Indian foreign policy, from 'idealism' to 'realism', or from a moral-value based approach to a pragmatic one (ibid.).

Along such military relations to solve border problems, Sakhong more logically argues that for the past 60 years, ethnic armed-resistant movements in Burma and Northeast India have been seen as the means to regain the rights of self-determination for their homelands, to protect the dignity and identity of the peoples, and to preserve and promote the culture, language, religion, and way of life for all these unrecognised peoples. He thinks that, most of all, these ethnic nationalities are fighting for the dignity of the people; for their long held traditions, heritage, and way of life; and for their national identity and not necessarily for independent sovereign state for their respective homelands. But even if some groups are fighting for a sovereign nation-state, Sakhong believes that, it needs to be re-evaluated in the light of contemporary international political trends and the forces of globalisation. He thinks that if both governments and ethnic insurgent groups could find a political solution, and create peace and harmony in the region then Northeast India, Chin State, Eastern Nagaland, Kachin State, and all the western valley of Upper Chindwin could become not only the gateway between Northeast and Southeast Asia, but the region can also become the place where the value of unity in diversity is practiced and the beauty of pluralism can flourish (Sakhong 2010). With such sustained military and political bilateral dialogues, it is also important to develop a people-to-people contact between the nations to develop better and fruitful understanding for resolving such age-old problems. People and civil society across the border now like to share the problems in several fora to find a common solution to their problems. During my visit to Myanmar in the year 2006, as a part of the delegation from the MAKAIAS, Kolkata, for research collaboration with the Myanmar Chamber of Commerce, Yangon University and with Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar, I found a very positive response from the scholars and government officials of Myanmar to collaborate with India on several research issues, which can find a way for settling border disputes and can explore more co-operation in future. The common people of Myanmar are keen to extend trade and other economic relations with India. Therefore, it is time that more contacts, cross-border visits and understanding need to be developed, so that a congenial solution emerges in future.

Coming to the infiltration issue, two border-states of the Northeast, Nagaland and Mizoram are exposed to illegal migration from Myanmar, who

cross the border in search of livelihood and security. But such infiltration is not as alarming as from Bangladesh to Northeastern states. There were waves of refugee exodus from Burma to neighbouring countries like Northeast India as a result of these military campaigns. In particular, hundreds of Naga refugees fled to Nagaland in India in the beginning of 1992. India protested over this Naga refugee issue and asked the Burmese government to stop atrocities on innocent villagers on the border. Later, India and Burma worked together for the repatriation of these Naga refugees to Burma (Aung and Myint 2001). On the other hand, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has asked the Mizoram government to take steps in checking influx of Myanmarese nationals to the state through the porous 404-km international border. The MHA had instructed the state to stop movement of Myanmarese nationals beyond the 16 km radius of the Mizoram–Myanmar border. A report says that an estimated 86,000 Chin Christians have crossed the border from Myanmar since 1988. Most of them have crossed over the porous border into Mizoram, travelling to Shillong and then also to Delhi for a hope to start a fresh life in Indian soil. Chin being the poorest region in Myanmar, which has not developed at all for last two decades has three-fourth of its population below poverty line. Also the Christian minority in this region is threatened by livelihood and identity issues, and, thus, crosses the border to look for an alternative secured life in India. Around 60 per cent of the Chin–Burmese diaspora is under 35 years, who are spreading fast across the world to escape the torture of Myanmar government (*The Times of India* 2011b). The MHA is concerned over unchecked infiltration of Myanmarese nationals, particularly Chins and Burmese Mizos, into the state in search of jobs and to seek asylum from the military junta. According to the Indian Passport Act, Myanmarese nationals, especially Chins, were allowed to travel up to 40 km from the border inside Mizoram as they have many relatives on both sides of the border. But the amendments made afterwards allowed them only up to 16 km. The MHA directed the state government that any Myanmarese national intending to go beyond 16 km inside Mizoram has to obtain permission from New Delhi (ibid.).

Apart from militancy, insurgency and infiltration issues, other security threats in Indo-Myanmar border are like narcotics and small arms trade have destroyed the legal and official trade and other economic possibilities between the two nations. Nag shows about 13 such sources, which have so

far been identified for the inflow of only small arms into Indo-Myanmar region (Nag 2006: 315). Both these regions of Myanmar and India are similar in economic development, though both are hubs of rich natural resources. Lack of economic opportunities with high disparity, poverty and non-existence of trade law and other infrastructure facilities have encouraged illegal activities across border areas, which eventually became more gainful and acceptable for the people of these areas. Strong illicit financial assets are illegally transacted and have accentuated the acute problems of disparity in this sub-region. Myanmar known as the hub of heroin production in Southeast Asia, its immense profits are being laundered through an extremely weak and unregulated banking system, which also finds a passage through Northeast India. The World Factbook of CIA has estimated illicit opium production of 340 metric tons in 2008, an increase by 26 per cent from 2007, and its poppy cultivation in 2008 was 22,500 ha, a 4 per cent increase from 2007. The opium production has further increased up to 690 metric tons in 2012, while poppy cultivation also has gone high to 51,000 ha. This makes Myanmar world's third largest producer of illicit opium accounting for nearly 80 per cent of world's drug supply. The Shan state of Myanmar remains the source of 94 per cent of Myanmar's poppy cultivation. As pointed out by Bhaumik, though Afghanistan's poppy output has surpassed Myanmar, but its production level has not gone down. The more worrying factor is about the Golden Triangle, where there is eight-fold increase in the production of methamphetamines. Methamphetamines are cheap and their consumption among the youths is rising throughout the world, since they are the performance-enhancing drugs (Bhaumik 2009: 192). Myanmar remains the major source of methamphetamine and heroin for regional consumption for their low costs. Lack of government will to handle such situations has made Myanmar a major narco-trafficking nation and money laundering continues to hinder the overall anti-drug efforts in the country (CIA 2009). The drug lords in Myanmar are exploiting country's economy, which has created a parallel black economy of huge size. Myanmar being part of the 'Golden Triangle', including Laos and Thailand, such drug problems has persisted in the country for last 20 years. Indian and Western narcotics control officials fear that Myanmar's military rulers, with close relations with most of the drug cartels, who do not challenge the

regime directly, might have started taking it easy on the drug front (Bhaumik 2009: 192).

The Northeast, being nearest to Myanmar, gets affected through illegal trade of narcotics and arms from that country. These drug cartels as mentioned by Bhaumik use almost 30 different routes to traffic their drugs into Northeast India on their way to Western markets and this, he feels, poses serious threat to the region for the following reasons:

- (a) Trafficking through the Northeast corridor has multiplied the local consumption. This has a direct effect on increase in the number of drug addicts, increasing the risks of becoming HIV-positive and, in turn, disturbing the social fabric of the region.
- (b) Involvement of serving military and paramilitary personnel in drug trafficking is on rise, which in turn can undermine the discipline and morale of the Indian armed forces, further weakening the policies of frontiers and checking drug trade. Also such drug mafias tend to undermine the political establishment and even the judiciary.
- (c) Ethnic rebel armies in Northeast India also tend to be affected by the 'Burma syndrome' and sometimes protect the drug mafias (ibid.: 195–96).

A majority of drug traffickers arrested are Myanmarese nationals, especially Chins, who could easily mingle with the locals of Northeast India as they have the same physical features and also speak the same language. Unless opium cultivation is restricted and some alternative cash crop production is encouraged for the farmers, this border area will turn to be a dotted poppy field. The nexus, as further pointed out by Bhaumik, that is being formed between the rebels, drug lords, and local officials could undermine the effective presence of the state and its institutions in the Northeast India (Bhaumik 2009: 197). Initiatives between the two nations renewed at government level again in 1999 to control drug trafficking and to curb insurgency in this region, which was formalised by an agreement signed in Kohima. As argued by Singh 'the two countries also agreed to co-ordinate in future military campaigns against ethnic separatists in border areas and take joint action against drug trafficking. This agreement was soon followed by exchange of frequent visits of army personnel' (Singh 2005:

292). These visits signify the importance of closer ties between the nations to deal with such security threats in this porous border of India and Myanmar. Bhaumik further argues that, 'Operation All Clear' in 2003 by Bhutan has become India's latest inspiration for moving away from the 'insurgent crossfire' model to one of trans-regional cooperation with neighbours to control transborder insurgencies in the Northeast. Indian diplomats have been trying to convince Burma as well Bangladesh to end aid and other support to Indian rebel groups. Also India has stopped supporting the rebel groups in Burma and Bangladesh with the hope that they would reciprocate (Bhaumik 2009: 179). It shows that at this hour, India is keen on constructive engagement and economic co-operation, which can usher prosperity in the region and can reduce security threats.

MYANMAR IN NORTHEAST INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

Myanmar economy, which is yet to catch up with modern global, regional and open trade partnership, ranks 153 out of 157 countries in Economic Freedom Index (The Heritage Foundation 2008) and ranks 151 out of 177 countries in Human Development Index of the UNDP report (2011). India's initiative for economic engagement with Myanmar is, therefore, tough and challenging. The country's military regime as argued by Koppuzha could neither bring prosperity nor could attain peace and human security. Rather, he says, relations between the regime and the common population perpetually remain tensed. Human suffering is immense with nearly one-third of children under five still being malnourished, while diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are rampant (Koppuzha 2008: 3). Added to these, the cyclone Nargis in 2008 had devastated Myanmar to an insurmountable extent with enormous deaths and destruction. The report of *The Economist* says that the death toll from this cyclone went up to 100,000 with a further 1 million being rendered homeless and many more remained without fresh water, leading to more deaths from disease and starvation. This has affected Myanmar's rice growing areas, and brought down its substantial share of rice export in the world market (*The Economist* 2008: 35). Such crises in Myanmar demand an economic restructuring through co-operation and engagement at transnational level. India being its close neighbour, bordering through Northeast India has initiated the process of co-operation and

engagement in many possible ways like building up the road infrastructure, and opening of Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road through Northeast India's passage for improving transborder economic activities. As mentioned by Tony Allison,

The 160 km highway, which was built entirely by the Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation at the cost of US\$ 30 million. This Friendship Road links the Northeastern Indian border town of Moreh in Manipur state with Kalewa on the Chindwin river in Myanmar and would be extended to the second largest Myanmar city of Mandalay. Ultimately, the road will be a key link in a proposed Asian Highway linking the continent to Europe ... As Important, the road link is a major diplomatic gain for both nations. For isolated Myanmar it is being heralded as a coup for the military regime in challenging the international boycotts they face for the repression of democracy. For its part, New Delhi gains much by deepening its engagement with Yangon to ward off what it perceives as a potential threat from China's growing influence in Myanmar (2001: 1).

According to Ramu Patil, Chandel district of Manipur, where Moreh town is located, could be the gateway to Asian nations when such proposed Transasian Highway becomes a reality (Patil 2010). India's recent fast domestic economic growth has made the country to extend her economic relations, engagement and co-operation with other countries. It has rightly made an attempt to diversify its economic engagement with Southeast Asian countries, and several policies and measures are being adopted for regional and bilateral economic engagement, of which her 'Look East' policy is the most widely discussed one. India's recent initiative on Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN marks the culmination of India's continuous efforts to frame a durable 'Look East' policy. Mukherjee argues that the India-ASEAN FTA which has opened up the coveted USD 1.1 trillion ASEAN market to Indian exporters is a historic landmark, where tariffs comes down to zero on 4,000 items of bilateral trade (Mukherjee 2009: 54). In the context of bilateral relations with Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar is gradually becoming a favoured destination for India due to following reasons:

- (a) Myanmar is strategically located at the tri-junction of East Asia, South Asia and South East Asia, which can serve as land bridge between India and prospering economies in the East and South East Asia. Also having good relations with Myanmar will allow India to check on the growing influence of China in the region.
- (b) Economic potentials with large oil and gas resources are attractive to any emerging nation like India.
- (c) India has both a land border (1,640 km) and a maritime boundary with Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. Four Indian states (Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram) border Myanmar. It is the second largest neighbour of India, and the largest on the eastern flank. Myanmar can be an important partner in solving the prolonged insurgency problem in North East India (Kuppuswamy 2006).

Marie Lall is of the opinion that,

Apart from the advantage of jointly fighting militants with the Myanmar Army, cooperation between Myanmar and India would lead to greater trade in the region, with the border opening up gradually, leading to more local prosperity. This in turn, it is hoped, would quell the drug and arms trafficking for which the region is notorious. India is aware that it needs Myanmar's co-operation to stem the narcotics problem, the insurgency, and security threats in that border region. India is also aware that by opening up the northeastern borders and allowing for increased local trade, a regeneration of this land-locked area is possible. Again, this cannot be done without Myanmar's support. This economic factor, seen as a means to ending the ethnic violence, is at the bottom of Delhi's change of path (Lall 2006: 424–46).

Thus, during the present decade, India's bilateral relations with Myanmar has entered a new era, and strengthening this relations, India now hopes to curb the security issues like insurgency drug smuggling and small arms trade in Northeast India more effectively than before. India's keenness on 'constructive engagement' emphasises primarily on participating in economic activities with Myanmar but not in its internal affairs. Badal Das

Ghoshal is of the opinion that, soft power strategies can find solution more successfully through common political values, peaceful means of conflict management and economic cooperation. Thus, India's visibility in Myanmar can be strengthened in areas like education, democracy, economy, and culture (Ghoshal 2009: 14). As argued again by Singh that there can be frictions between regional military commanders on the fields during the time of joint operation, but overall mutual concern, understanding between the nations now has reached a matured stage. Therefore, ground realities are expected to be solved amicably (Singh 2005: 295). On the other hand, as India has started re-visioning its Northeast in a development-centric approach, it also has transformed its attitude towards both Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries, the countries which are geographically close to Northeast India. As Vibhanshu Shekhar argues,

The new positioning of Myanmar in India's geo-strategic calculus has received a major push since 2004. Both economically and geophysically, Myanmar has emerged as an important bridge in connecting India's Northeast with Southeast Asia and China's southern province of Yunnan. Since economic integration of the Northeast with Southeast Asia will facilitate greater economic development, India has embarked on various infrastructural development programmes both bilaterally and multilaterally, passing through different parts of Myanmar (2008: 2).

Success of such ambitious initiatives would depend on the sustained level of understanding of both the countries. The steps that remained tangible so far are the signing of USD 100 million Kaladan multi modal transit transport project between India and Myanmar to facilitate Northeast India's trade and connectivity with its Southeast Asian neighbours through access to the sea. This alternative route can develop the Sittwe port and can improve the connectivity between Myanmar and Mizoram. Mizoram can directly benefit and resolve its food crisis by importing rice from Myanmar. The other is the thoughts and initiatives to reopen the 'old Burma road' or the 'southern silk route' for trade connectivity. Hence as the two partners leverage more on exploring areas of engagement, the better it is for their bordering areas.

It is important to assess at this point whether these ties for development and economy that are made so far have any tangible implications on the security scenario in the border areas of Northeast India. As argued by K. Yhome, 'going by the way they have responded to these significant developments indicate increasing mutual sympathy and understanding. High-level exchanges took place and important agreements were signed during and after these events' (2008: 19). Though several economic ties have been made between the two nations for last decade, but by and large India–Myanmar relations have been guided by geopolitical issues. So this shift in strategy towards economic co-operation is a new one, and it is rather too early to see the ground realities and to establish any causal linkage between economic ties and security issues at this moment. The security issues which surfaced way back in mid-1960s and which has destroyed the peace and stability for so many decades in these border areas cannot possibly be erased out by just a decade old initiatives of constructive engagements. But such initiatives have at least broken the age-old cold relationship between the nations and a sense of trust and understanding is gradually developing. Therefore, both India and Myanmar need to put efforts to make their economic ties functional. Once these ties are translated into realities, a different socio-economic landscape would emerge in this region, where local people and the cross-border ethnic communities would be provided with several opportunities for livelihood and participation. This would keep 'life' as referent object for both development and security. It would also then be easier to make an organic linkage with economic development to reduce conflicts, apprehensions and such economic ties would then act as prerequisite to ensure better security for the people in both the nations. Routray rightly quotes Mani Shankar Aiyar, the former Minister of Development of North Eastern Region, 'Emergence of the north east as an economically prosperous zone could be the best guarantee to the security concerns' (2009: 4).

MORE HOPES IN MYANMAR'S DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS

For extensive economic co-operation, India needs to identify the existing strength of Myanmar's economy, which is still predominated by agriculture and sectors like oil and gas, mining and timber. Manufacturing and service

sectors in Myanmar are struggling with inadequate infrastructure, added with deteriorating health and education systems, and endemic corruption. The CIA report highlights a major banking crisis in 2003, which has shattered the country's 20 private banks and disrupted the economy. As of 2007, the largest private banks operated under tight restrictions limiting the private sector's access to formal credit. Moreover, in September 2007, crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, including thousands of monks, further strained the economy as the tourism industry, which directly employs about 500,000 people, suffered dramatic declines in foreign visitor levels (CIA 2009). To recover, Myanmar needs better investment, infrastructure and business climate to promote foreign investment, exports and tourism. To achieve all these, the nation needs a transition from military autocracy to the policy of democracy. Only in a democratic society the people of Myanmar will have more freedom and stronger voices to assert their right to live with dignity and with economic security. Also with democracy, several ethnic groups of the country can have more freedom and power to speak. This will reduce ethnic-insurgency issue in the country, which will improve the cross-border situation. India on the other hand is prospering with its strength in service sector. Both nations can, therefore, leverage each other's complementarities in joint ventures and under democratic forces. Many enterprising youths of both sides may find opportunity in Indo-Myanmar trade with better opportunities created and curbing the illegal productive activities like poppy cultivations. Constructive possibilities that are already on surface include construction, hydrocarbon technologies, drugs and pharmaceuticals, infotech training and education, light engineering and manufacturing, and which need deeper initiatives from both sides.

Apart from bilateral ties, the regional partnership through Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and sub-regional partnership through Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) and Mekong-Ganga Co-operation (MGC) also can provide a link between India and Myanmar and other nations in multilateral forum. For example, the sub-regional group BIMSTEC brings together 1.3 billion people, comprising around 21 per cent of the world population with a combined GDP of around USD 750 billion having considerable amount of complementarities. BIMSTEC covers 13 Priority Sectors led by member countries in a voluntary manner; namely, Trade & Investment, Technology,

Energy, Transport & Communication, Tourism, Fisheries, Agriculture, Cultural Co-operation, Environment and Disaster Management, Public Health, People-to-People Contact, Poverty Alleviation, Counter-Terrorism, and Transnational Crimes. Similarly, attempts like the Mekong–Ganga Co-operative Forum, where five of India's Eastern neighbours, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, are present have prioritised tourism, culture, education, transport, communication, and infrastructure. These sub-regional engagements can play a very important role in Indo-Myanmar economic relations. Under the MGC programme, Yhome mentions that a 1,360 km trilateral project between India, Myanmar and Thailand is on progress and India has also signed an inter-governmental agreement on the project Trans-Asian railway that would connect 28 nations (CIA 2009).

Border trade, the other vital area, needs attention and modification, especially for India's Northeast. As mentioned by Marie Lall, India is becoming one of Myanmar's major export partners and it is keen on importing Myanmar's gas now. Indo-Myanmar border trade also has charted out a trade expansion between two nations by setting policies in the context of India's priority in developing the Northeast (Lall 2006: 424–46). But the trade traffic across the border still remains low and India shares lowest among Myanmar's border trade partners at USD 17 million in 2007. Rather, unofficial trade, as seen earlier, is much higher in this border region. An estimate by The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade shows that the unofficial trade between India and Myanmar, through Northeast corridor is INR 2,200 crore at current prices, using primarily the Moreh route through Manipur, Champai route through Mizoram and Longwa route through Arunachal Pradesh (Bhaumik 2010). China, on the other hand, through Ruili is engaging in extensive trade with Myanmar and tops the list, followed by Thailand and Bangladesh. Therefore, opening more trade centres in border-states of Northeast India like Avangkhu and Lungwa in Nagaland, Pangsau pass of Arunachal Pradesh and Behiang, Skip and Tusom in Manipur might improve border trade and relations between the two nations by solving cross-border ethnic issues. In the third India–Myanmar Joint Trade Committee meeting in 2008, it was decided to increase even the items list from 22 to 40 and to operationalise the banking arrangement between the two nations

(Yhome 2008: 7). The Imphal–Tamu–Kalemayo road is another project that is now pushed by the Government of India.

Energy co-operation is India's other priority area, and policies governing energy resource development and management are closely related to economic development policies. It remains a core issue that given the high cost and increasing demand, of how to meet such growing energy problems in the region. The immense possibility of energy co-operation between India and Myanmar even in hydro-power and hydrocarbon sectors also has attracted attention in both the nations. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) have engaged themselves in A-1 block of the Rakhine Coast of Myanmar, known as Shwe for greater energy co-operation between them. Also there are further explorations of huge gas fields by GAIL and ONGC in blocks adjacent to A-1 in Block A-3 termed as Mya-1. These according to Lall, are making Myanmar an energy exporting nation, which would expectedly increase further sites in the country. These sites would in turn be explored and developed by multinational companies across the world and Indian companies also can be the major players (Yhome 2008: 7). Essar Oil Ltd. was in fact the first Indian private sector company to enter into this business with Myanmar in 2005. Over the years, some more deals have been made and by the year 2008, India's total tally of blocks in Myanmar became seven. India also plans to build a pipeline from Myanmar through Northeast region. This is expected to run along the Kaladan River from Sittwe port in Myanmar to Mizoram, Assam, West Bengal in India and finally joins Haldia–Jagdishpur pipeline in Gaya in Bihar. The estimated cost of this 1,400 km route is USD 3 billion (Yhome 2008: 30).

But all these lofty ideas of India on importing gas from Myanmar, doing business and extending other economic ties are yet to concretise. This is because apart from various unresolved security issues between the nations, both China and Thailand have remained much bigger and older players in Myanmar, making India's task for economic ties even more difficult. As argued by Lall, China has a growing influence and involvement in Myanmar in various fields since late 1980s. There exists a large number of Chinese investors and traders throughout northern Myanmar (Lall 2006: 424–46). Therefore, the idea of expanding economic co-operation between these two nations essentially needs to focus more on developmental issues, creation of

infrastructure and projects, which can enhance the goodwill, create opportunities and reduce security threats of the two nations. As mentioned by Yhome, India has been providing development aid to Myanmar for several projects, which has extended over INR 100 crore since 2000, and the volume has been increasing over the years (2008: 12). Such gestures of co-operation in turn provide opportunity and extend confidence to Myanmar to diversify its relation with India other than China.

Given such perceived advantages and also because of a gradual increase in the comfort levels between the leadership of two nations since 1998, the Indian Government has initiated to converge the interest of both the countries (Yhome 2008: 3). The attempts have begun with improved economic ties for bilateral engagement, like investment, infrastructure, trade and other co-operation. As mentioned by Lall, the key to India's new policy is economic factor and its new foreign policy priority is also based on economic decision. Thus, she argues that trade with and through Myanmar would revive India's Northeast and make both the nations prosperous (Lall 2006: 424–46). Also Myanmar is India's gateway to ASEAN; it is the only country of this group to have a land and maritime boundary with India. Therefore, as India became a summit level partner of ASEAN and a member of the East Asia Summit, a better relation with Myanmar can be beneficial in many respects. The recent planned infrastructure development of road, rail and waterways from Indian side are all steps in the direction of establishing economic and business connections with Myanmar. India's trade scenario so far shows that during the year 2007–8, both Asia and ASEAN have emerged as the major export market for India, which shares 49.95 per cent, followed by Europe with 23.01 per cent, America 17.80 per cent, Africa 7.20 per cent and CIS and Baltic 1.03 per cent. Similarly, India's import share also remained highest from Asia and ASEAN, sharing 61.13 per cent followed by Europe with 21.20 per cent, America with 9.05 per cent, Africa with 6.68 per cent, and CIS and Baltics with 1.58 per cent (Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics 2007–8). It would be interesting to see that though Asia and ASEAN dominate India's trade sector, its share with Myanmar in particular has remained negligible even in the recent past. The official trade record in Table 3.1 shows that for the period of 2003–4 to 2010–11 the average share of India's trade with Myanmar remained marginal at around 0.28 per cent with export share as 0.12 per cent and import share

as 0.39 per cent, respectively. Also the annual average growth rate of India's trade with Myanmar for these eight years has increased by 16.68 per cent, with the growth rate for import as 17.21 per cent and growth rate for export as 16.72 per cent. Against this, India's total trade has grown by 26.58 per cent for the same time period, with its import growth rate as 29.76 per cent and export growth rate as 22.38 per cent, respectively.

Amongst other possible bilateral economic ties, trade remains a major component. But as seen in the estimated figures in the Table and also as argued by Singh, due to unsatisfactory linkages between the people and trade organisations of both the sides, trade diversification has not been explored optimally to increase even bilateral trade (Singh 2007: 3). According to the Indo-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce, the volume of trade for example can be increased further, if Indian businessmen were to invest more in Myanmar. While government to government co-operation has increased in various fields, India's private sector investment in Myanmar remains low. So, the latter is trying to woo Indian entrepreneurs to invest more in areas, such as pharmaceuticals, cement, fertilisers, information technology (IT), and food processing. In June 2008, both governments, therefore, signed four economic cooperation agreements, including Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement (BIPA) to facilitate Indian investment in Myanmar and vice versa. This will boost trade in the long run (Yhome 2008: 6).

The following is a list of some more suggested areas of co-operation in the line of soft strategies between the two nations, focusing on Northeast India:

- (a) Addressing the lack of business information and perception gap, which can be achieved largely by creation of different information bureaus at the government levels in both the countries.
- (b) Tracing historical/cultural/religious roots to strengthen mutual trust and 'friendship network', by organising joint workshops, seminars and other interactions at academic, scholarly, non-academic and government levels. For example, Buddhism is the natural link to Southeast Asia, which can be intensified through various ties.

Table 3.1 India's Trade Trend with Myanmar (INR crore)

<i>Values</i>	<i>2003-4</i>	<i>2004-5</i>	<i>2005-6</i>	<i>2006-7</i>	<i>2007-8</i>	<i>2008-9</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>
Export to Myanmar	411.92	508.59	490.09	633.74	746.19	1,017.76	984.73	1,521.76
Growth Rates	-	23.47	-3.64	29.31	17.74	36.39	-3.25	54.54
Total Export	2,93,366.74	3,75,339.54	4,56,417.87	5,71,779.27	6,55,863.52	8,40,755.05	8,45,533.64	11,42,648.97
Growth Rates	-	27.94	21.60	25.28	14.71	28.19	0.57	35.14
Share	0.14	0.14	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.13
Import from Myanmar	1,879.47	1,823.83	2,328.63	3,540.94	3,259.28	4,240.77	6,107.94	4,651.15
Growth Rates	-	-2.96	27.68	52.06	-7.95	30.11	44.03	-23.85
Total Import	3,59,107.66	5,01,064.56	6,60,408.89	8,40,506.33	10,12,311.70	13,74,435.55	13,63,735.54	16,83,466.96
Growth Rates	-	39.53	31.80	27.27	20.44	35.77	-0.78	23.45
Share	0.52	0.36	0.35	0.42	0.32	0.31	0.45	0.28
Total Trade with Myanmar	2,291.39	2,332.43	2,818.72	4,174.69	4,005.48	5,258.53	7,092.67	6,172.91
Growth Rates	-	1.79	20.85	48.11	-4.05	31.28	34.88	-12.97
India's Total Trade	6,52,474.40	8,76,404.09	11,16,826.76	14,12,285.60	16,68,175.22	22,15,190.61	22,09,269.19	28,26,115.93
Growth Rates	-	34.32	27.43	26.46	18.12	32.79	-0.27	27.92
Share	0.35	0.27	0.25	0.30	0.24	0.24	0.32	0.2299

Source: Export–Import Data Bank, Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Available at <http://www.dgft.gov.in/> (accessed 7 December 2011).

- (c) Capacity building of weaker regions of Northeast India and northwest Myanmar primarily by ensuring better human security and by creating better capability index with the initiatives of both the nations.
- (d) Facilitating trade and border trade negotiations and studies on trade acts and trade modeling by creating appropriate trade centres in the concerned locations. The need for the creation of academic institutes on trade studies in any of the northeastern states is essential, so that human resource can be created at local levels to handle it with more

transparency and with efficiency, along with which infrastructure facilities need to be adequate at all border trade points.

- (e) Building small and medium enterprises (SME) in the weaker regions of both the nations, through proper incentives and facilities. This would increase private investment and would raise propensity to invest in different areas.
- (f) An emphasis needs to be given for the creation of local resource based production network with local skills. This would preserve the production of traditional items and the traditional form of markets and also would increase local participation and development becomes inclusive.

Myanmar is going through a tough challenge of political transition. After 20 years, on 7 November 2010, the country underwent an electoral process, which signified a path towards pro-democracy, which is acceptable to all in Myanmar vis-à-vis to the world. Also the release of Aung San Suu Kyi,¹ immediately after the election on 12 November 2010 by the pro-military party Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), and her eventual historic victory has opened a space for democracy and ushered a voice of hope amongst the people of Myanmar. As pointed out in the editorial in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, the current president of Myanmar Thein Sein is now being hailed as country's 'Gorbachev'. But it is still too early to make any definite statement on the change that is being ushered in Myanmar. These changes indicate a churn within the military regime about political strategy (*EPW* Editorial 2012: 9). But along such internal political transition, the country also is gradually opening up with other nations for various collaboration and co-operation. India's attempt towards economic engagement with such a country at this moment needs skilled diplomatic persuasion along with effective, attractive and trustworthy trade and economic policies along with its active support towards democratisation of Myanmar's polity and society. Thus, Aung San Suu Kyi's India visit, after four decades, in December 2012 is one such remarkable step towards strengthening such mutual relation between India and Myanmar. As reported by Ramachandran, during her meeting with former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, she emphasised that a larger co-operation is needed between the parliaments and judiciaries of the two neighbouring nations and

also concurred that ‘people-to-people relations’ are very significant. She is particularly interested in learning from the Indian experience in agriculture, health and science and technology. Thanking the people of India for supporting the cause of democracy in Burma, Suu Kyi, while delivering the Nehru Memorial Lecture, spoke about the ‘influence of Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the principles that guided India’s freedom struggle and how they inspired her as she continues to strive for a democratic Myanmar’ (Ramachandran 2012).

If such diplomatic and economic engagements become successful, an understanding between the nations would evolve that would help to create congenial space in Northeast India. This helps directly to improve the security scenario in the region, which would provide stability for development. Development in turn would widen the opportunities, extend the freedom of choice and capability, and help again to improve the security scenario. Keeping such causal linkage in mind, one can hopefully say that economic relations would improve the deep-rooted security problems in both India and Myanmar, and can create a space for Northeast India, even as the inevitable tug of war between the conscience and *real politik* continues. A similar economic and constructive engagement is also essential with its other eastern neighbour, Bangladesh, which has already made a historic transition to political democracy. The present progressive Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League has already started showing various positive gestures for improving its relation with India, more specifically with West Bengal and with Northeastern states in terms of counter-insurgency operations, illegal migration and other issues. Her government has heroically handed over the powerful ULFA leader Arabinda Rajkhowa to the Indian government, and has promised to co-operate with India on the Northeast’s insurgency issues as well as to improve various border trade activities between the two nations. Therefore, this is almost a right time for India to redefine its Northeast policy with such neighbouring nations, who are in transition for democratic rule.

NOTE

1. Aung San Suu Kyi is presently the chairperson of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar. She has been at the forefront of confronting the military dictatorship in Myanmar, which governed the country for most of the post-Independence period. She was released from house arrest in 2010 after being incarcerated for almost 15 years. After her release, she has participated in the election process registering emphatic electoral victory in the April 2012 by-elections, winning 43 out of 45 seats. Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD victory in the by-elections is a historic step in Myanmar's transition to democracy. Suu Kyi strongly believes that democracy is fundamental to progress, peace and stability not only for Myanmar but also for the entire region. She looks forward to strengthen close relations with India. There was widespread international approbation for her consistent struggle for democracy in Myanmar. She was conferred with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her peaceful resistance against military dictatorship and for her struggle to bring democracy in her country.

4

‘Bangladesh’s Transition’ and India’s Borderlands

CHANGING CONTOURS

Bangladesh is one of the closest neighbours of contemporary India’s East and Northeast. It shares a long border with this region of India from all sides except from the south, which leads to the Bay of Bengal. Though separated from Indian political boundary during Independence, East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh, could never be away from India’s history and its discourses, especially for bordering regions of East and Northeast. The British administration and its policy of redrawing boundaries for strategic interests have changed this subcontinent extensively, and had finally led to the creation of two nations. Yet the age-old ties and interactions of people at various levels of these two nations could not possibly be wiped away along such different historical discourses; rather, it has created multi-layered confusion amongst the people across the borders. For example, Assam, the major representative state of this region during both the pre-colonial and colonial periods, has been the sufferer of multiple division and fragmentation through the drawing of such various artificial boundaries. Sanjib Baruah rightly points out that during the colonial administration, there were number of occasions when the boundaries of Assam got changed according to their administrative convenience and whims. Thus, back in 1892, the British officials suggested that Chittagong should be transferred to Assam for the functional reasons, which would help the European tea planters and their other economic activities to make an outlet for their products through Chittagong port. In 1905 a new expanded province was created combining Assam with all eastern part of Bengal, the present day Bangladesh (Baruah 1999: 26). While describing such a landscape of Northeast before India’s independence, Sibopada De argues:

prior to the great partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the present Northeastern part of India comprised the province of Assam, two princely states, Manipur and Tripura, and a scarcely populated wilderness called NEFA. Spreading over an area of 203443 square kilometers, Assam with its capital Shillong was the premier state in the north-east under the British ... The province was then deprived of its premier position after its merger with East Bengal in 1905 when a new province, Eastern Bengal and Assam, came into existence. East Bengal's age old capital Dacca, naturally, became the new capital of Assam instead of Shillong. It remained so until 1911 when Assam was separated from East Bengal and restored to its pre-merger position with capital at Shillong (De 2005: 13).

But even as a separate province Assam, until the end of British rule, included the large Bengali speaking district of Sylhet, and it was treated as a frontier land for Bengal. Sylhet, therefore, remained a part of Assam throughout the British period from 1874 to 1947 and there were many consequences of such inclusion in region's history beginning with large number of 'sponsored immigration' by the British administration to the region and its impact on visible demographic transformation. Thus, it is obvious that given the circumstances of the formation of the colonial province of Assam, the boundaries do not coincide with those of pre-colonial Assam in the political, cultural and economic sense, and such a construct of colonial political geography has profoundly affected the subsequent political discourse of the region, where issues like immigration and inter-community conflicts have remained dominant (Baruah 1999: 27–28). As argued by scholars like A. C. Bhuyan and S. De, the merger period between East Bengal and Assam provinces in the period 1905 and 1911 is actually most meaningful to study such cross-border migration phenomenon in this region. According to them, a large Muslim population of lower strata from East Bengal at that period had migrated to Northeastern part of India, as legal status was never questioned, since it was simply an inter-district migration. Muslim migrants found Assam valley as good as their native place with better economic opportunities. Assam administration did not officially oppose such inflow in its fallow land to grow more food for the natives of Assam (Bhuyan and De 1978: 308). This flow of migration continued even

after the separation of Assam from East Bengal in 1911, which created remarkable demographic changes in Assam province. This gradually turned the mindset of the Assamese population against migrant Bengalis. The conflicts then surfaced at linguistic and cultural spaces between Assamese and Bengali speaking communities in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, which eventually also had hit the economy in the valley (De 2005: 14–15).

Such inter-community low intensity conflicts on several issues with immigration as the major one continued, and eventually started culminating into largescale violence in the post-Independence period, and the state vis-à-vis the region of Northeast became perpetually problematic and security-sensitive. Other scholars like Ajay Bose, while referring to the worst post-Independence conflict phase of 1980s in Assam, says that

The turmoil over immigration, which has torn the East Indian state of Assam for the past three years (since 1980), has been brewing since the turn of the century. The seeds were sown during British rule in India, which was primarily responsible for starting the mass influx of immigrants into Assam 80 years ago. Eager to consolidate their rule over lush but backward province, British officials flooded Assam with clerics from Bengal, tribals from the surrounding hill regions to work in their tea gardens, and Muslim peasants from East Bengal to cultivate vast tracts of fallow land which the easy-going Assamese farmers had not bothered to plough ... By 1931 not only had the land owned by Assamese peasants reduced drastically but the census that year revealed that only 31.5 per cent of the state's population — just 5 per cent more than the Bengalis ... A series of clashes between the Assamese and Bengalis soon followed. Although the two communities are fairly close culturally and linguistically, the locals were naturally resentful to Bengali dominance — they were by this time, virtually running the state (1983: 70).

In this historical setup, Assam continued to receive inflow of migrants and their subsequent settlement helped inflate Muslim population in the province. Table 4.1 shows the change in Muslim population in Assam over decades.

Such fast changes in demography had brought in resentment and a series of conflicts within Assam's Brahmaputra Valley. The trail of unredressed ill-feeling according to Bhuyan and De continued to persist in the native mind only to gain increased momentum in the long run with threats on economic issues. The immigrants' occupation of wastelands, grazing and forest reserves, mass squatting, and purchase of land were some serious causes to anguish the Assamese minds in Brahmaputra Valley as they adversely affected their economic life (Bhuyan and De 1978: 14–15). On the other side in the Surma Valley of the state, consisting of the districts Cachar and Sylhet, which were dominated by the Bengali population had a strong ethnic affinity, and Muslim migration to East Bengal from Cachar made the district Sylhet a Muslim majority district. Thus, Assam much before Independence faced problems of socio-cultural and ethnic reconfiguration with immigration flow from East Bengal. In 1930s, both Asomiya Sangrakshini Sabha and Assam Pradesh Congress Committee expressed their preference on 'restricted migration' (Bhuyan and De 1978: 14–15). Also, as mentioned by Baruah, since the Brahmaputra Valley was predominated by Assamese and Surma valley by Bengalis, the inter-valley rivalry was another colonial euphemism for the Bengali–Assamese conflicts over culture, immigration and other policies that were a permanent feature of political life in Assam during colonial period and beyond (1999: 40). Given the demographic composition of colonial Assam, as argued by Baruah, the demand for changing boundaries of Assam and separation of Sylhet was not surprising from the point of view of the Assamese public intelligentsia and politicians. The proposal for separating Sylhet from Assam had a majority of support in both the valleys, though British administration was generally opposed to the move. As it was feared that such separation would open the door to other demands for changing boundaries, and it would upset the political status quo, especially critical Hindu-Muslim balance of the population. However, controversy on Sylhet ended with the end of colonial rule in 1947 (ibid.: 40–42). A new international boundary was drawn along with Independence, which brought in a new set of challenges in the landscape of Northeast India. The region which was eventually formed with many small states carved out from the political boundary of Assam under the State Re-organisation Act 1956, and all the small states were formed on ethnic line.

Table 4.1 Variation of Muslim Population in Assam: 1871–2001 (%)

<i>Undivided Districts</i>	<i>Lakhimpur</i>	<i>Sibsagar</i>	<i>Nowgong</i>	<i>Kamrup</i>	<i>Darrang</i>	<i>Goalpara</i>	<i>Cachar</i>	<i>Tot</i>
1871	3.19	4.27	3.93	8.16	5.88	22.4	36.63	12.0
1881	3.67	4.4	4.61	8.13	5.79	23.97	33	12.6
1891	3.2	4.34	3.9	8.74	6.01	27.62	30.77	12.4
1901	3.21	4.16	6.08	9.11	5.15	27.79	30.55	12.4
1911	2.86	4.31	4.88	9.68	5.38	35.23	37.26	16.6
1921	2.63	4.25	16.72	14.63	7.64	41.51	38.04	19.4
1931	3.58	4.70	29.93	24.61	11.54	43.92	40.41	23.4
1941	4.98	4.82	33.76	29.07	16.42	46.23	42.48	25.7
1951	4.66	5.82	34.18	29.29	17.03	42.94	38.49	24.6
1961	5.64	5.83	33.74	29.36	19.35	43.42	39.91	25.2
1971	4.59	5.27	31.32	31.33	16.19	42.25	39.88	24.5
1991	5.96	6.36	35.77	32.87	22.22	46.91	43.02	28.4
2001	6.52	6.95	38.42	34.91	25.20	51.31	45.47	30.9

Source: Government of Assam (2012). Figures indicated in the table are as per the areas of the districts in existence prior to 1951.

ISSUES OF IMMIGRATION ACROSS THE NEW BORDER

To understand the contemporary genesis of multi-dimensional issues of conflicts between India's post-colonial Northeast and the present Bangladesh, cutting across both the pertinent issues of security and development, one necessarily has to begin with the event of India-Pakistan partition in 1947 and its consequences. This helps to understand why and how post-Independence human migration has taken place between these two neighbours, and its consequences in the borderland of India. The historic partition of India-Pakistan in 1947 and redrawing of boundary, eventually followed by the liberation of Bangladesh from West Pakistan after more than two decades in 1971 has very substantially outlined and transformed the political geography and subsequently post-colonial political history of the entire region of this subcontinent. In 1947, as pointed out by Bombay Chronicles, when the final question of dividing the subcontinent on the

political map arose on the basis of religion and territorial contiguity, such burdensome responsibility was entrusted to Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who chaired the Border Commission at that period. He to his best possibilities had drawn an international line called 'Radcliffe Line' between India and Pakistan including its eastern wing. In certain areas, Radcliffe was forced to draw the line across private kitchens, dwelling houses, cow-sheds, paddy fields and village markets, most prominently in the Northeastern part of India). The length of this historical Radcliffe Line, for example, between Assam and East Pakistan was 262 km of which 92 km was riverine. Interestingly, this artificial border was both a porous and imposed, which one could easily trespass upon whenever one liked it from either side of the frontier. Thus entry across the line became an easy matter (De 2005: 17). Indo-Bangladesh border is, therefore, extensively a virtual maze of riverine terrain, enclaves and adverse possessions by both sides. India shares 4,095 km border with Bangladesh, the longest amongst all its neighbours with almost half of it (1,879 km) across the Northeastern states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Sixty per cent of the border remained unfenced over the years with concrete pillars only (Hussain 2005: 4). The other eastern state West Bengal shares a 2,216-km long border with Bangladesh. In June 1962, under the project 'Prevention of Infiltration into India of Pakistani Nationals' (PIP) of Government of India, 52 posts were established for security screening to exercise a physical check and control over immigrants. By 1984, 1,873 posts were sanctioned under this scheme. The idea behind this scheme was to stop infiltration at the border, and make it unattractive for the foreigners to come to Assam by denying the benefits that lure them into this state (Government of Assam 2012: 10).

This geographically close and newly created neighbour, Bangladesh henceforth becomes most important in shaping the internal security and development discourse of India's Northeast and eastern state West Bengal; and in this context, the importance of Indo-Bangla relations can hardly be exaggerated. With the creation of new borders, where Sylhet became a Muslim majority, and separated from Assam, and formed the base of Pakistan's eastern wing, the issue of immigration started to turn into complex political and religious dimensions from sheer economic and cultural dimensions of colonial immigration trend (De 2005: 16). The newly formed ruling elites of West Pakistan, in the Urdu and Islam phase, made

desperate attempts through torture and atrocities to drive the Bengali Hindu population out from its eastern wing. The result was a communal riot in 1950, which spontaneously forced thousands of Hindus to cross the border and take a safe shelter in Indian soil. The borderlands of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and West Bengal became the obvious abodes of such largescale migration of Hindu Bengali refugees from East Pakistan. Such exodus drastically reduced the percentage share of Hindu population in East Pakistan, from 28 per cent in 1941 to 22 per cent in 1951. On the other hand, the plight of the middle-class Bengali Muslim population in East Pakistan was neither better under such West Pakistani regime, who were the poor victims of their economic exploitation and cultural hegemony. In 1952, the Bengali Language movement had sparked the nation and eventually a large number from the lower stratum of Muslim population were forced to cross the border to take shelter and get livelihood in safer Indian eastern states. The number of such migrants other than refugees was initially reported by the State Government of Assam to be between 1,50,000 and 2,00,000 but later estimated to be around 5,00,000 (Government of Assam 2012: 6). The nearest borderlands of East and Northeast had to bear the brunt of such huge influx of population along such changing political contour of the subcontinent. Most of the panic-stricken Bangladeshi citizens were given shelter in the Indian refugee camps in the borderlands of Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, and even Bihar during that crisis phase. Due to such serious situation, Government of India promulgated an Ordinance on 6 January 1950, which was soon replaced by an Act known as the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950 that came into effect from 1 March 1950. The Act said any person having ordinary residence outside India, who has crossed the border and affected the interests of the local people would be removed from India or Assam within such time and by such route as may be specified in the order. The Act, however, was not applicable to the refugees fleeing Pakistan on account of civil disturbances. Subsequently, the Nehru–Liaquat Agreement was signed on 8 April 1950 between India and Pakistan on the rights of the immovable property of a migrant, which facilitated the return of almost 1,61,360 displaced persons, who fled to East Pakistan due to communal disturbances (Government of Assam: 6–7). Also, a citizenship Act of 1955 was chartered to define illegal migration, which stated that anyone who entered India without a valid

passport or other valid travel documents, or someone who had valid document but stayed in India beyond the permitted period would be treated as an illegal migrant. But as influx continued, Government of India proposed other measures like issuing of identity cards to the Indian citizens in Assam and creating of barbed wire fencing across the border. But nothing was concretised and migration continued even during the Liberation War in Bangladesh in 1971. According to R. Gupta,

Ever since the partition of the subcontinent and formation of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, their nationals came to India with or without valid documents. Up to 1971, over 4.7 million Hindus had sought refuge in India, mostly in West Bengal. The volume of opposite flow of Muslims to East Pakistan is not however known. The terror let loose by the Military Junta of Pakistan compelled about 10 million more to cross over to India in 1971. Many went back after the Liberation War in 1971, but a sizable undocumented section stayed back and mingled with the mainstream of India's life (cited in Datta 2004: 1–21).

India, on humanitarian grounds, had extended support and provided shelter to about 10 million people from Bangladesh during its Liberation War; most of them were accommodated in its eastern and northeastern border-states. These refugees came bare-footed and were compelled to cross the border to evade the gruesome torture of the West Pakistani military regime. Such sudden demographic influx, according to De, became an important event in the history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (2005: 37). India at that period showed its excellent humanitarian and secular gesture to handle that burden, which was imposed by Pakistan and its military junta. Indian administration though had to face a great challenge to provide with basic amenities to such huge number of refugees at that time, but handled this severe crisis with enough political maturity. Samar Sen, who was then the Indian delegate to UN General Assembly, mentioned in November 1971 that the estimated cost of relief operation for Government of India in the financial year ending in March 1972 was assessed by the World Bank at USD 700 million. India, naturally, anticipated a serious and adverse impact on its economic development to meet such huge costs. Despite the assurance

of many international countries, India received only USD 200 million and the deficit of USD 500 million was to be met by cutting India's development expenditure, and it finally had to leave an impact on the economic, social and political life of India by threatening its stability and security (Sen 1971). Thus, this sudden burden of 10 million East Pakistani refugees on India has affected its economy immensely even in the long run. After the liberation of Bangladesh, a number of refugees went back to Bangladesh, but due to tremendous trust deficit, many, especially Hindu immigrants, have stayed back and spilled over in the society over time.

It is, therefore, undeniable that such a turn of events has extensively affected the economy and security of these frontier states of India most. Each of these border-states' demography changed drastically having a fresh pressure on their ethno-cultural dynamics, land resource and economic life. For example, the large ethnic and tribal community of Tripura became marginalised overnight by the occupation of large number of Hindu Bengalis from neighbouring districts of Bangladesh. The indigenous population of Tripura became landless, exploited and was driven to the dense forest areas. As observed by De, the situation brought about a radical change in demographic character of Tripura. With the inflow of such Bengali immigrants, the indigenous ethnic groups turned into minority in their own land. Such vast demographic change, according to him probably did not take place in any other part of Northeast. The immigrant Bengali community was therefore politically and socially looked upon with suspicion by different ethnic minorities in Tripura after the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 (De 2005: 108). The pan-issue of tribal and non-tribal conflicts, several indigenous movements and identity issues and its politics saw their roots in these changing political and demographic contours of the subcontinent. On the contrary, speaking of Assam again, Nicole Ball argues that during the post-Independence phase, Assamese people became conscious about their dominance in Assam, which led tension between these two groups and eventually provoked bloodshed late in 1980s. This, according to Ball, is nothing but a by-product of British colonialism. He says that during the post-Independence immigration phase from East Pakistan to Assam, the demographic imbalance within the state with more and more addition of non-Assamese population had on one hand created pressure on the economy and on the other hand had reawakened the idea of nationalism and sub-

nationalism. The concept of identity had started playing a dominant role in the region, and then finally violence in Assam started surfacing in late 1970s along with a specific incident of the inclusion of 45,000 Bangladeshis in the Assam electoral rolls (Ball 1988: 71). As illegal immigration continued even after 1971 and various political institutions started playing games with such immigrant population in their electoral systems, the region, in turn, gradually became the victim of a security and development crisis. The electoral system of politics in the region and concept of 'vote bank' amongst several political parties, both at regional and national levels to a large extent then remained responsible for the deterioration of the security scenario in the region and the issues of migration, with both legal and illegal aspects, eventually became a pertinent issue to reshape the demography, economy and security of this borderland of India.

West Bengal, another borderland of East India, also has been exposed to similar kind of cross-border illegal migration issues. Political re-mapping in post-Independence India could not wipe out the age-old cultural, historical, linguistic, social and economic congruity of two sides of Bengal. The movement of people, therefore, continued across the borders even after partition, mostly unaccounted. The same migration history, human connectivity and their sufferings that prevail in other borderlands of the world has remained true in this part of India also. The same consequences of conflicts, violence, economic pressure, land grabbing and displacement, and ethnic reconfiguration have manifested here, threatening both its development and security over a period. As argued by B. Banerjee:

An unaccounted migration from Bangladesh has been a great concern in the border areas of districts in West Bengal, a state in India. The antisocial activities in the border area have been disturbing the normal life and posing security threats to the nations (2003: 337).

Such sustained cross-border human movements and perpetual intra-community conflicts, therefore, need re-visits by the scholars, academia and policy-makers, which only can provide a better, stronger and alternative political approach and negotiation to deal with such issues.

BANGLADESH AND ITS INTERNAL CHALLENGES

The Indo-Pak War of 1971, which defeated Pakistan, had given birth to Bangladesh, and had brightened the scope of early returns of refugees to their motherland. But the huge internal challenges of this newly-born nation was not ready to take back such large number of population to over-burden the already shattered and strained economy of Bangladesh. As pointed out by the media from distant lands like West Australia, this newly-formed state was one of the poorest and over-populated lands on the earth. Its economy was devastated, administration was shattered, its authority maintained by foreign army, and people faced with ultra-poverty and embittered by war.

Within Bangladesh a big challenge was to meet the immediate miseries, poverty and chaos, its task of re-building the nation, and improving human security was immense. Having such reality, the out-migration became a natural phenomenon and continual process mostly to Indian bordering territories. Even after several decades of her liberation, Bangladesh still is characterised as one of the poorest countries in the world having a geographical area 144,000 sq. km, with a population of around 150 million, composing 90 per cent of them as Muslims. The country has highest density of population with 763 per sq. km as per 1991 census (Anh 2003: 336). While narrating the contemporary migration scenario in the Asia-Pacific region in recent times and the case of Bangladesh, Dang Nguyen Anh says that

During the last three decades, the Asian and Pacific region has witnessed a substantial increase in the scale, diversity and complexity of population movements. The region is made up of both highly developed countries, exerting an enormous 'pull' effect on migrants, and some of the world's poorest countries where recourse of migration is a form of survival and a means to escape poverty (2003: 1).

Bangladesh, he thinks, falls in the second category and pushes her population out of the country, and its migration became a natural and forceful outcome to encounter country's low income and high human poverty along with other issues like religious fundamentalism and political volatilities. Along such a precarious political and economic situation, Bangladesh is also affected immensely with natural disasters like yearly floods and cyclones. These shatter its strong economic base like agriculture

to provide food, shelter and livelihood to its vast population. The 1970 cyclone alone had killed 2.25 lakh of people. The consequent effect of this cyclone has brought in food shortage, spiralling prices and chaotic financial condition, which resulted in famine for a lingering period from 1974 to 1981 (Murshed et al. 1997: 76). The challenge of restructuring and capacity building continued within the country with aids and helps from various countries and international agencies.

On the other hand, the people of this newly-born nation, who had witnessed the worst genocide in world history, were also acutely suffering from severe development gaps and poverty, and had remained poor victims of inter-ethnic violence, minority issues, loss of lives and religious fundamentalism and other such security issues. Thus, after the Liberation War, though Bangladesh was free from West Pakistani regime and its brutalities, but was threatened with her fresh internal challenges of ethnic and minority conflicts. Several minority communities, who were deeply involved in Liberation War, and sacrificed lives, became ruthlessly marginalised and brutalised by the Islam fundamentalism of newly born nation of Bangladesh. The minority groups gradually were disillusioned with fact that they would not have any secured life within the country under such a pan-Islamic agenda. Merciless ethnic repression and ethnic cleansing had taken place not only on Hindu population, but spilled over to the other communities like Chakma Buddhist groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Thus, the poor Bengali Hindu and Chakma Buddhist families were forced to migrate to several Northeastern states after 1972, making a fresh pressure on these border territories of India in terms of both development and human security. Till today, the Chakma community in Bangladesh is threatened and killed systematically, and are fleeing to Indian border-states and spreading over in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.

The severe economic pressure has not left out the poor and underprivileged Muslim population who also, at several periods, have been forced to cross the border illegally to escape hunger and to search for livelihood opportunities in the Northeastern territory of India. Thus, till today the issue of poverty remains one of the major economic causes of the exodus in Bangladesh. Table 4.2 reveals that till the year 2000, nearly half of the population of Bangladesh was below the poverty threshold. The figures reflect both rural–urban and regional disparities in terms of poverty ratio.

For example, in rural sector during the year 2000, the poverty ratio was 52.3 per cent, which is much higher than its urban sector with 35.2 per cent. This scenario has improved after five years in 2005, where the percentage of population below poverty line has gone down to 40 per cent, with rural poor as 44 per cent and urban poor as 28 per cent, respectively. This is a significant decline, but while one looks at the regional level, it can be found that places like Barisal, Khulna and Rajshahi of western Bangladesh have the highest concentration of poor, whereas Chittagong, Dhaka and Sylhet, the eastern and central parts of the country, are comparatively in better positions. Such overall reduction in poverty level can be explained with country's economic performance in general, poverty reduction policies, and also due to the share of high remittances, which the country receives from its huge diaspora. The purchasing power and living standard across the population of Bangladesh has improved and has made a direct impact on poverty reduction.

Table 4.2 Incidence of Poverty across Regions in Bangladesh

<i>National/ Division</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
	<i>2005</i>			<i>2000</i>		
National	40.0	43.8	28.4	48.9	52.3	35.2
Barisal	52.0	54.1	40.4	53.1	55.1	32.0
Chittagong	34.0	36.0	27.8	45.7	46.3	44.2
Dhaka	32.0	39.0	20.2	46.7	55.9	28.2
Khulna	45.7	46.5	43.2	45.1	46.4	38.5
Rajshahi	51.2	52.3	45.2	56.7	58.5	44.5
Sylhet	33.8	36.1	18.6	42.4	41.9	49.6

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2006, HIES 2005, cited in the *Bangladesh Economic Review* (2011), Ministry of Finance, Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Poverty has a direct relationship with land holding. Table 4.3 shows that incidence of poverty goes down once the land ownership becomes high.

Thus, both in rural and urban sectors, as population owns more land, the level of productivity also goes high and the overall poverty level tends to go down. It is interesting to see that with occupation of land more than 7.50 acres, the urban poverty actually reduces to zero. Thus, land is one of the most important determinants to measure poverty. The landless labourers, therefore, look for an opportunity to cross the border and find their livelihood in the lands in Indian territory.

Table 4.3 Incidence of Poverty by Ownership of Land in Bangladesh

<i>Size of Land Holding (Acres)</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
	<i>2005</i>			<i>2000</i>		
All Size	40.0	43.8	28.4	48.9	52.3	35.2
No Land	46.3	66.6	40.1	46.6	69.7	36.6
<0.05	56.4	65.7	39.7	57.9	63.0	38.3
0.05–0.49	44.9	50.7	25.7	57.1	59.3	27.3
0.50–1.49	34.3	37.1	17.4	46.2	47.5	27.4
1.50–2.49	22.9	25.6	8.8	34.3	35.4	10.2
2.50–7.49	15.4	17.4	4.2	21.9	22.8	9.1
7.50+	3.1	3.6	0.0	9.5	9.7	0.0

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2006, HIES 2005, cited in the *Bangladesh Economic Review* (2011), Ministry of Finance, Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Table 4.4 Income Distribution Pattern in Bangladesh (%)

<i>Household Income Group</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
	<i>2005</i>			<i>2000</i>		
Lowest 5 per cent	0.77	0.88	0.67	0.93	1.07	0.79
Highest 5 per cent	26.93	23.03	30.37	28.34	23.52	31.32
Gini-Coefficient	0.467	0.428	0.497	0.451	0.393	0.497

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2006, HIES 2005, cited in the *Bangladesh Economic Review* (2011), Ministry of Finance, Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh also suffers from a very high income inequality scenario, which has revealed the ultra poor in a much vulnerable shape in the country. Table 4.4 shows the glaring gap between its rich and poor population in the country. The poorest 5 per cent share a negligible 0.77 per cent of the country's total wealth, whereas the top 5 per cent take away the lion's share of 27 per cent of the country's wealth. The urban scenario is expectedly worse than its rural scenario, reassuring a very unsatisfactory distribution mechanism. Such economic imbalance forces both the skilled and semi-skilled recorded and accountable number of labourers to migrate to a better land and developed nation for a better living. But the unskilled ultra-poor people try to escape poverty by illegally entering, and in desperation, the nearest destination for sheer survival; the Indian borderland remains a near and favoured destination for them. Such groups from Bangladesh, which is very large in number tries to survive on bare necessities on Indian soil by working as cheap labourers. They constitute agricultural labourers, domestic help, rickshaw pullers, construction labourers, vegetable vendors, among others. Thus, the argument made by R. Skeldon is true for country like Bangladesh, where there exists a tight linkage between migration and poverty. Migration here can be considered an alternative to escape poverty. It through remittances, also contributes to the poverty reduction at their place of origin. Poverty has created the premise for hundreds and thousands of Bangladeshis to migrate to other lands and its neighbouring nation India has to perpetually bear the brunt (Skeldon 2003: 3).

But over the years the situation has been gradually improving within Bangladesh. The report of the *Bangladesh Economic Review* (2006)

highlights that the country has now been showing resilience and thus emerging better than before, despite having its confrontational politics. The growth performance of Bangladesh economy had been relatively strong during 1990s showing considerable improvement over the previous two decades. During 1990s, growth had been around 5.3 per cent per year with 3.3 per cent growth of per capita GDP. GDP growth has further accelerated and reached 5.7 per cent per year for 2000 to 2006 with 4.2 per cent growth of per capita GDP (Ministry of Finance 2006: 1). The country's growth has surpassed many other nations which have same level of income, and also has shown positive trend in other socio-economic indicators. The report further mentions that Bangladesh recently has been rated as one of the next 11 potential countries after Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). World Bank also has identified Bangladesh as one of the most rapidly growing economies among 31 large developing countries in the recent times (ibid.). Both government and non-government organisations (NGOs) have been implementing various effective programmes on employment opportunities, income generation and upliftment of the poor in Bangladesh. About 54 per cent of country's development and non-development budgets during the period of 2000–4 have been allocated for several direct and indirect poverty reduction schemes (ibid.: 14). Such tremendous efforts of reducing human poverty by improving the basic components of education, health and nutrition in Bangladesh have been universally appreciated. Even in the economic front, the report shows that during 2005–6, agricultural growth rate was 4.67 per cent, manufacturing by 10.45 per cent and service sector by 6.79 per cent. Manufacturing apparently seems to be country's strength but the share of employed labour force in agriculture is highest with 51.69 per cent, manufacturing shares 9.71 per cent and the service sector absorbs around 6.96 per cent of labour force and others share the rest. As mentioned earlier, a substantial source of income in Bangladesh also comes from overseas employment in terms of remittances. A sizable number of Bangladeshi professionals, skilled, semi-skilled labour force are employed in different countries of the world. This overseas employment and workers' remittances have contributed significantly to the country's economic development through reduction of unemployment, improvement in living standard and augmenting foreign exchange reserve and income. An outflow of people from Bangladesh for the period of 1976 to 2006 has remained

about 43.37 lakh. Total number of Bangladeshis employed abroad during 2005–6 was 291 thousand, whose remittance accounted to USD 4801.88 million (Ministry of Finance 2006–7). But in terms of favoured nations of destination for skilled and educated Bangladeshis, the preference is for the developed Western nations and also the Islamic nations of Middle and Southeast Asia, but not the neighbouring nation India. India and its borderlands are for Bangladesh's unaccounted, unskilled people, who belong to the poorest stratum of the society, and who cross the border without valid documents. By having such unskilled immigrants from Bangladesh, Indian borderlands do not gainfully add value to their economy and the productivity.

While looking at the other dimensions of migration, Indian borderlands also have remained favourable to many Bangladeshi people for having a close cultural and ethnic connectivity. Pranati Datta has rightly argued that

though the border between Bangladesh and India are demarcated, for cultural and historical reasons, free movement across the border is a common phenomenon. Coupled with underdevelopment of Bangladesh, this free movement has resulted in large-scale undocumented migration of poor Bangladeshis to India (2002: 336).

The ethnic, cultural and religious network and bondage which developed during the colonial period has been acting as a strong pull factor to attract more people to cross the border and enter into this borderland. Thus, small towns of Barak valley of Assam like Hailakandi and Karimganj face an influx of people with hope for a better life in this democratic and secular land. Datta has classified the broad push factors from Bangladesh that have so far remained responsible for infiltration to India's East and Northeast as follows:

- (a) Economic factors like poverty, lack of employment opportunity, struggle for livelihood, forced grabbing of landed property from minority groups, economic insecurity, and lack of industrialisation.
- (b) Social and demographic factors like high population growth, very low human development index and ethnic conflicts.

- (c) Political factors like fear of uncertainties, riots, military empowerment, lack of democracy and secularism, religious interference in politics, and poor law and order scenario creating violence and insecurity (2004: 346–49).

Thus, in just over four decades, the history of Bangladesh has almost remained perpetually wounded with its economic underdevelopment and instability on one hand, and turbulent political discourses and dictatorships along with unrest religious forces and fundamentalism on the other hand. Such internal problems of Bangladesh have persistently multiplied the problems of India's frontier states, having close geographical proximity and porous borders. Though the opinion of Bangladeshi scholars in this matter is different at times, given India's economic strength, they believe, it has less threats from a country like Bangladesh. Therefore, eminent Bangladeshi scholar Rehman Sobhan says that

The significance of this transformation in India's fortunes and its place in the global arena, is that it no longer needs to be over-concerned with the negative responses to its overtures to its immediate neighbours, which include Bangladesh. It is obviously advantageous for India if it can earn the friendship and cooperation of its neighbours. It would be both sensible and statesmanlike for it to extend its global reach, situated within a harmonious neighbourhood. However, the establishment of such a zone of harmony is hardly indispensable for establishing India's presence in its global and regional relations, where much bigger opportunities beckon than are on offer in its immediate neighbourhood (2010).

He also warns that

in the circumstances indicated above, if Bangladesh prefers to remain disconnected from its larger neighbour this is certainly inconvenient for India and will add to the costs of its economic transactions with its North-East region as well as its Eastern neighbours (Sobhan 2010).

Such a perception (from a Bangladeshi scholar) certainly reassures that though India has become a powerful player, yet it continues to face deep

challenge to frame a careful border policy with nation like Bangladesh at least to restore stability to its disturbed but economically potential Northeast region. But with the recent change in political regime, Bangladesh is aiming earnestly to transform its socio-political scenario with pro-democratic and open policies.

‘BANGLADESH FACTOR’ IN EAST AND NORTHEAST INDIA

Better economic opportunities, ethnic connectivity, democratic and secular political forces in Indian territory, therefore, have so far remained the pull factors to attract people en masse from Bangladesh over the years, but this process eventually had set in the process of Balkanisation of Northeast. As rightly argued by Muthiah Alagappa, illegal migration though less immediately and less visibly disruptive, upsets the internal order. The migrants affect the local ethnic and religious balances in the areas that have a precarious social structure. Many Indian decision-makers, for example, see Bangladeshi migrants as the most dangerous influx. There is a widespread perception that they are filtering into West Bengal and the Northeastern states in large numbers and moving on to the big Indian cities in the North. As Bengalis they exacerbate anti-Bengali feelings in Assam. As Muslims, they worsen communal relations in West Bengal, the Northeast and the major urban centres of India. Even though the impetus to migrate is a personal one and generally stems from broad socio-economic conditions. Bangladesh is regarded as either actively encouraging the movement of people or not doing enough to stop it (Alagappa 1998: 190). Though infiltration since 1971 had penetrated deeply into three Northeastern states, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, but the massive outburst of public grievance against such infiltration was re-surfaced in Assam in a much deeper scale amongst its angry young groups in late 1970s. Thus, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) was formed in the year 1979 to fight for the ‘just cause’ of Assam, which no political party ever dared to raise with an adverse consequence on minority electoral constituencies. The native youths of other Northeastern states expressed their solidarity with Assam movement on ‘foreign nationals’ issue (De 2005: 52–54). Such foreign national movement launched by AASU, which demanded detection, deletion and deportation of infiltrators continued for six long years for the period 1979–85 in the form of

boycott, non-cooperation, and massive violence. In 1983, Assam had witnessed one of the worst communal bloodshed and massacre of migrant population in Nelli. Assam agitation as mentioned by Jaideep Saikia against such immigrants can be termed as one of the most significant South Asian movement in this regard (Saikia 2004: 46). Udayon Misra while speaking about this movement in Assam on the issue of infiltration observes that

Though reservation have been expressed by the social analysts and scholars about the democratic content of the Assam movement, yet given the scale of people's participation in it, it must be said that there was a great degree of national content in it. Had it not been for its wide popular base, the movement would not have been able to sustain itself against such severe state repression for five long years. The Assamese middle class no doubt played the leading role in the agitation; but its success was ensured because of the strong degree of support it received from rural masses, both Assamese and tribal (2000: 132).

Subsequently, in 1983, when the Illegal Migrants Act¹ was passed by the Government of India, it was declared that, Bangladeshi citizens who entered into India on or after 25 March 1971 without valid documents were to be treated as 'illegal migrants'. In the same year, Illegal Migrants (Determination) Tribunals (IM[D]Ts) were established under IM(D)Ts Act 1983 to monitor the illegal migration cases in Assam. Subsequently the agitation in Assam against the issue of foreigners by its student union came to an end with the historic Assam Accord, signed by the Government of India under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership. The Accord mentioned that to secure the international border between Assam and Bangladesh and to prevent infiltration of foreign nationals, construction of Indo-Bangladesh Border (IBB) Road and Fence in Assam would be 100 per cent centrally assisted project (under clauses 9.1 and 9.2 of Assam Accord). The Assam Accord also provided for citizenship to those who came to Assam between 1 January 1966 and 24 March 1971 after defranchising for a period of 10 years, subject to registration. However, children born to these illegal immigrants may or may not be lawful citizens of India by birth. Thus, the provisions in Section 3 of the Citizenship Act of 1955 would apply here which states,

- (a) A person born in India on or after 26 January 1950, but before 1 July 1987, is a citizen of India by birth irrespective of the nationality of his/her parents.
- (b) A person born in India on or after 1 July 1987, but before 3 December 2004, is considered a citizen of India by birth if either of his/her parents is a citizen of India at the time of his/her birth.
- (c) A person born in India on or after 3 December 2004, is considered citizen of India by birth if both the parents are citizens of India or one of the parents is a citizen of India and the other is not an illegal migrant at the time of his/her birth (Government of Assam 2012:13).

Since then Assam government has taken several measures and procedures for detection and deportation of immigrants by deploying border police personnel, border organisation to obtain fingerprints and photographs of suspected foreigners, referring them to Foreign Tribunals, but such tasks have not remained very successful and infiltration continues. In 1996, in a winter session of the assembly, when the question was raised on the total number of illegal migrants in Assam, the government stated that ‘the exact number of foreigners and illegal migrants in Assam cannot be estimated as it is a fact of history and continuous process’ (ibid.: 20). But during the revision of electoral rolls in Assam in 1997, a category of D voters (disputed/doubtful) were identified, who could not prove their Indian citizens’ status, and were neither permitted to cast vote nor could contest election. There were total of 2,31,657 people under D category (ibid.: 18–21).

Amongst several studies, reports and records, the most pioneering and bold official report on infiltration issue of Assam was prepared by Lt Gen S. K. Sinha, who was then the governor of Assam. On 8 November 1998, he released the report titled *Illegal Immigration into Assam* and mentioned that such influx is fast changing the demography of Assam, making the Assamese people a minority in their own state. Such influx is the core issue behind the Assam student movement and subsequently also the outbreak of insurgency in the state (Sinha 1998). He made the following observations:

- (a) A silent invasion of Assam has been taking place for several decades and successive governments have failed to stem this demographic

onslaught. It started as an economic movement contributing to the development of Assam's agricultural economy and with Independence it acquired communal and political contours. Today an international dimension with security overtones has been added to this population movement.

- (b) With Assam's geo-strategic importance, Bangladesh's bursting population and growing international Islamic fundamentalism underscore the volatile situation created by this ongoing demographic intrusion from across the border.
- (c) Although Bangladeshi illegal migrants have come into several states of India, they pose a much greater threat in Assam than in any other state. If not effectively checked, they may swamp the Assamese people and may sever the North East land-mass from the rest of India. This will lead to disastrous strategic and economic results.
- (d) Due to political fragmentation, such an issue of great concern for national security has been made into a partisan affair and a matter of vote banks. It must be lifted above the mire of party politics and viewed as a national security issue of great importance.
- (e) Concrete steps must be taken on war footing to ensure that the borders are as nearly sealed as possible and the unabated flood of infiltration, reduced to a trickle. Concurrently, the highly discriminatory IM(D)Ts Act, which during the last 15 years has proved to be an exercise in futility, should be repealed. With deportation of illegal migrants to Bangladesh no longer a viable option, a new legislation needs to be introduced which will ensure a just, fair, practical, and expeditious approach to detecting illegal migrants.

As Assam's economy was fast deteriorating due to such heavy pressure of cross-border migration, the agitation and movement therefore was heavily supported by the Assamese people and civil society. The contemporary history of Assam became even more complex with the birth of underground outfit like ULFA in 1979, which as mentioned by Saikia, is a militant manifestation of Assam movement against illegal migration (2004: 66). Since then Assam became more of a security-sensitive state than of a development-centric state, with her development indicators going down to the bottom of the ladder, and became a land frontier attracting largescale

immigration. As pointed out by Sanjib Baruah, while the Assam movement itself focused on illegal migration, both supporters and opponents of the campaign relied on census data on population growth rates to make their case. Such census data, according to him, has been serving more powerfully as a tool to political leaders than as a tool for sociological description (Baruah 1999: 51–52). While arguing on the distinction between these two terms of immigrant and ethnic communities, Baruah says that though unfortunate, but this distinction has become a part of the ethno-political landscape of the region (1999: 53). Meanwhile government of Assam continues its efforts. A tripartite meeting for implementation of Assam Accord took place in 2005, and updation of NRC 1951 was also discussed. Government of Assam claims that detection cases during last 11 years have increased. Along with infrastructure improvement, Assam now is attempting to update National Register of Indian Citizens in phases and to initiate UID scheme for comprehensive database for the citizens.

Despite such efforts, migratory people are not openly accepted in a society, especially when they belong to different ethnic and religious groups. The social unrest and tension therefore bound to accelerate due to such inflow, which is visible in India's Assam and West Bengal (Pramanik 2005: 7). These two states for this matter are in focus and the worst victims of infiltration. The following tables take both Assam and West Bengal separately to show the degree of changes in population composition broadly among Hindu and Muslim. The rising share of Muslim population in the total number of such border-states of West Bengal and Assam not only signifies higher birth rates amongst Muslims but also signifies high immigration. This is because when it is compared with other states of India, it can be seen that the rise in Muslim population is not as high as these two border-states. In West Bengal, from 1971 to 2001, the percentage share of Muslim population had gone up to 25.25 per cent from 20.46 per cent, which straightaway indicates that a quarter of West Bengal population consists of Muslims. Though historically districts such as Murshidabad and Malda were dominated by Muslims, a national daily reports that perpetual illegal immigration from Bangladesh, coupled with higher birth rate among minorities, has led to a sharp rise in population in these border districts of West Bengal, including North Dinajpur. A high density of population along with land reform measures of the Left Front government in the state, during

the early years of their rule, led to fragmentation of land. This has slowed down agricultural productivity, on one hand, and has reduced the scope of land acquisition by the corporate houses for industrialisation, on the other, which has badly affected the economic development in West Bengal (*The Times of India* 2011).

Table 4.5 Percentage of Population Distribution (by Religion): West Bengal

<i>Districts</i>	<i>1971</i>		<i>1991</i>		<i>2001</i>	
	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>
West Bengal	78.11	20.46	74.72	23.61	72.47	25.25
Darjeeling	81.45	8.97	77.95	4.55	76.92	5.31
Jalpaiguri	86.81	21.25	84.81	10.04	83.30	10.85
Cooch Behar	78.56	35.89	76.45	23.34	75.50	24.24
West Dinajpur	63.07	49.13	62.51	36.75	74.01	24.02
Malda	43.46	56.63	52.25	47.49	49.28	49.72
Murshidabad	56.34	23.34	38.39	61.40	35.92	63.67
Nadia	75.91	28.68	74.35	61.40	73.75	25.41
24 Parganas	75.70	18.00	72.68	26.71	70.54	28.73
Howrah	81.81	19.20	77.46	22.22	74.98	24.44
Calcutta	83.13	14.20	80.60	17.72	77.68	20.27
Hoogly	86.89	12.89	84.88	14.52	83.63	15.14
Burdwan	82.21	17.17	79.69	19.55	78.90	19.80
Birbhum	70.56	29.19	66.61	33.06	64.49	35.08
Bankura	90.85	4.85	90.95	6.63	84.35	7.51
Midnapore	90.65	7.74	86.81	10.78	85.58	11.33
Purulia	92.89	4.64	90.95	5.98	83.42	7.12

Source: Social and Cultural Tables, Series 22, West Bengal. Census of India, 1971, GoI; for 1991 and 2001, estimated from Final Population Totals, Distribution of Population by Religion, Census of India 2001, West Bengal, Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal 2011 census data by religion is not released yet.

This increasing population amongst Muslim groups can be noticed even in other states in India along with the national level but it is worse in West Bengal and Assam. This is clear in Table 4.6 — it can be seen that in major Indian states, except Jammu & Kashmir, an increasing share of Muslim population is noticed. West Bengal being the bordering state of Bangladesh has higher share, which is just below Assam.

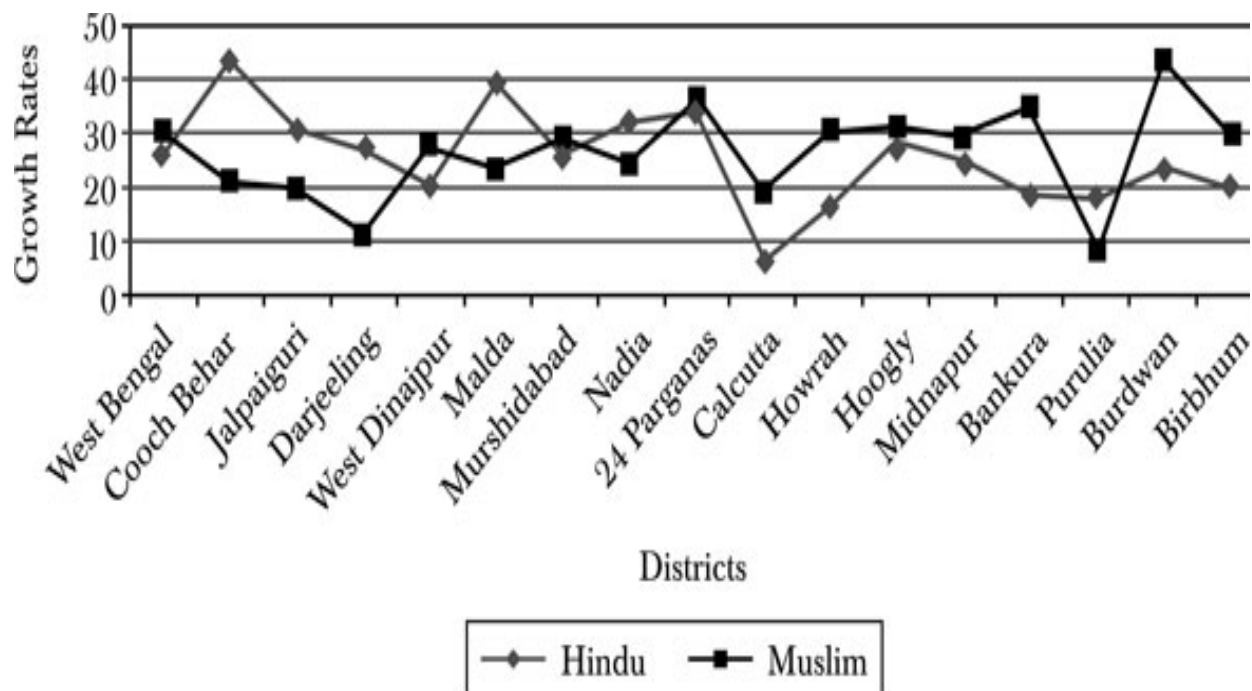
Table 4.6 Population Share in Major Indian States

<i>States</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>		
1961	2001	1961	2001	
India	83.4	80.5	10.7	13.4
Assam	66.4	64.9	23.3	30.9
Jammu & Kashmir	28.5	29.6	68.3	67.0
Bihar	84.7	83.2	12.5	16.5
Gujarat	89.0	89.1	8.5	9.1
Maharashtra	82.2	80.4	7.7	10.6
Karnataka	87.4	83.9	9.9	12.2
West Bengal	78.8	72.5	17.2	25.2
Uttar Pradesh	84.7	80.6	14.6	18.5

Source: Estimated from Census of India Reports of Various States for 1961 and 2001, GoI.

While looking at the decadal growth rates of population in West Bengal shown in Figure 4.1 and in Figure 4.2, one can see a distinct change. The growth rate of Muslim population during 1961–72 was lower than Hindu growth rate in many districts of West Bengal, but during 1991–2001, in none of these districts, Hindu growth rates remained higher than Muslim growth rates. This is a seachange in the demographic landscape of West Bengal.

Figure 4.1 Decadal Growth Rate of Population in West Bengal (1961–71)



Source: All figures courtesy of the author.

Another striking demographic feature in the state is revealed in the population distribution within the age group of 0–6, which shows that in West Bengal, this group of Hindu population in 2001 consisted of 12.69 per cent and the Muslim population in the same group consisted of 18.7 per cent (Figure 4.3). Thus, the high birth rate of Muslims is also responsible for this increase in 0–6 group.

Figure 4.2 Decadal Growth Rate of Population in West Bengal (1991–2001)

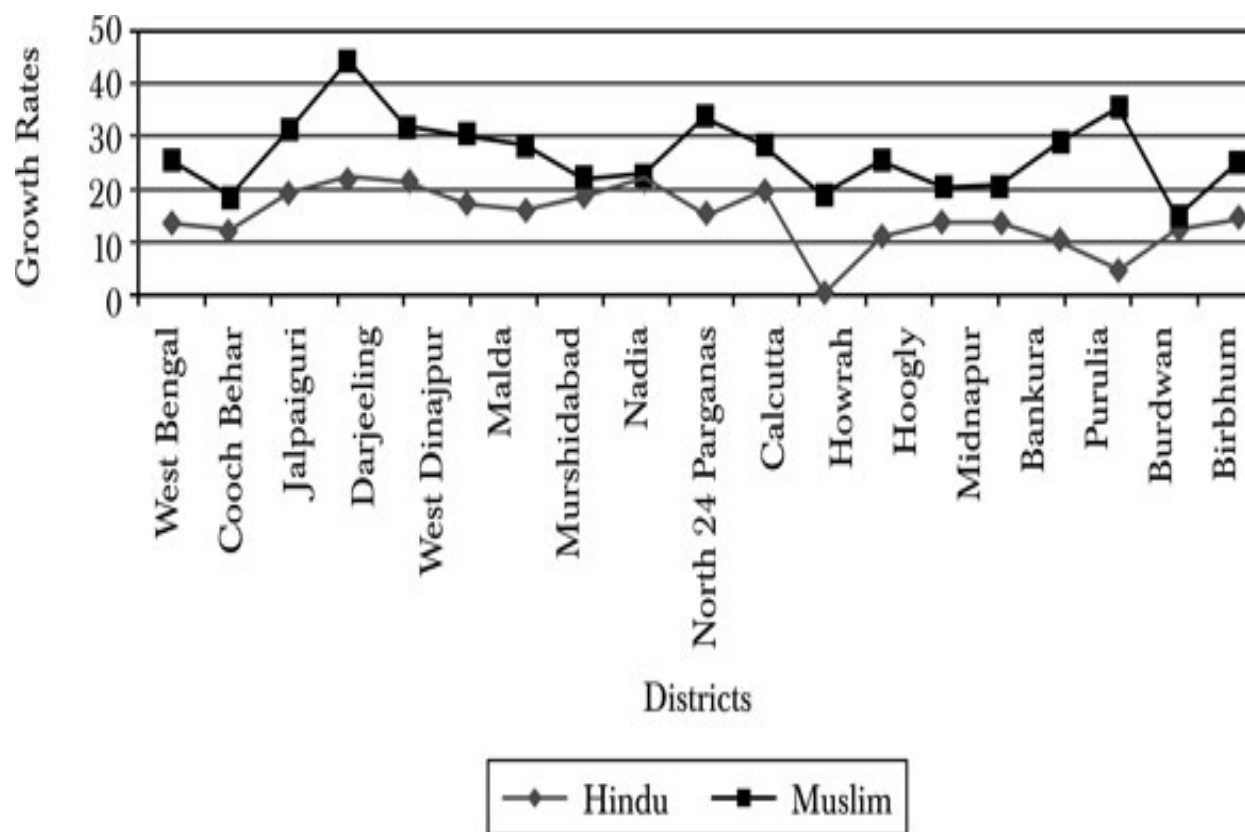
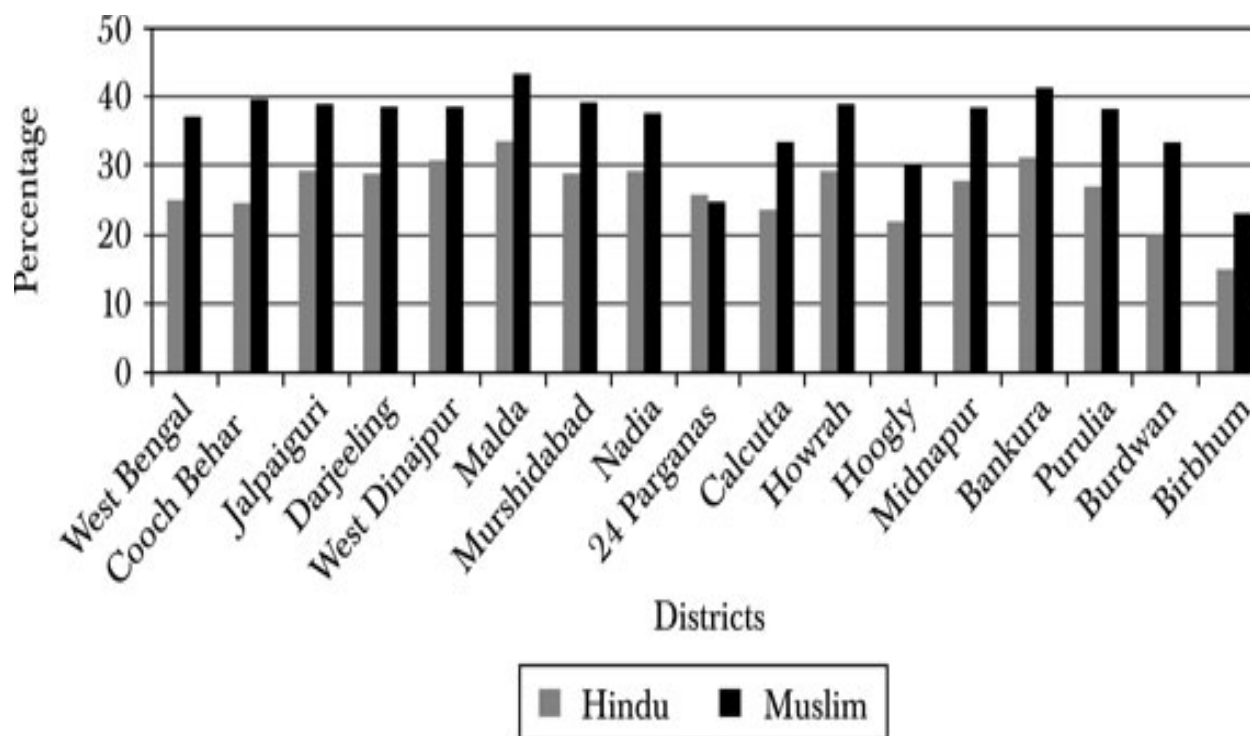


Figure 4.3 Percentage of 0–6 Age Group Population in West Bengal: 2001
(By Religion)



Similar is the situation in Assam, the census report of 1971 showed that only in this state, do some of its districts like Dhubri, Barpeta, Hailakandi, Goalpara, Karimganj, Nagaon, and Marigaon have more than 40 per cent Muslim population and the bulk comprises migrants from Bangladesh (Deka 2005: 101). The trend in the state continued and Muslim population has grown high at an alarming rate over the decades, and Assam agitators did not allow the Census Report of 1981 for Assam to be out in the state. Therefore, in the 2001 Census Report, it was shown that in the state as a whole the population share between Hindu and Muslim became 64.89 per cent and 30.92 per cent respectively, as seen in Table 4.7. The same group of districts now has a share of Muslim population much higher than Hindu population. Dhubri tops the list with 74.29 per cent Muslim population and Hailakandi on the other hand with 57.63 per cent Muslim population.

Table 4.7 Percentage of Population Distribution (by Religion): Assam

1991	2001
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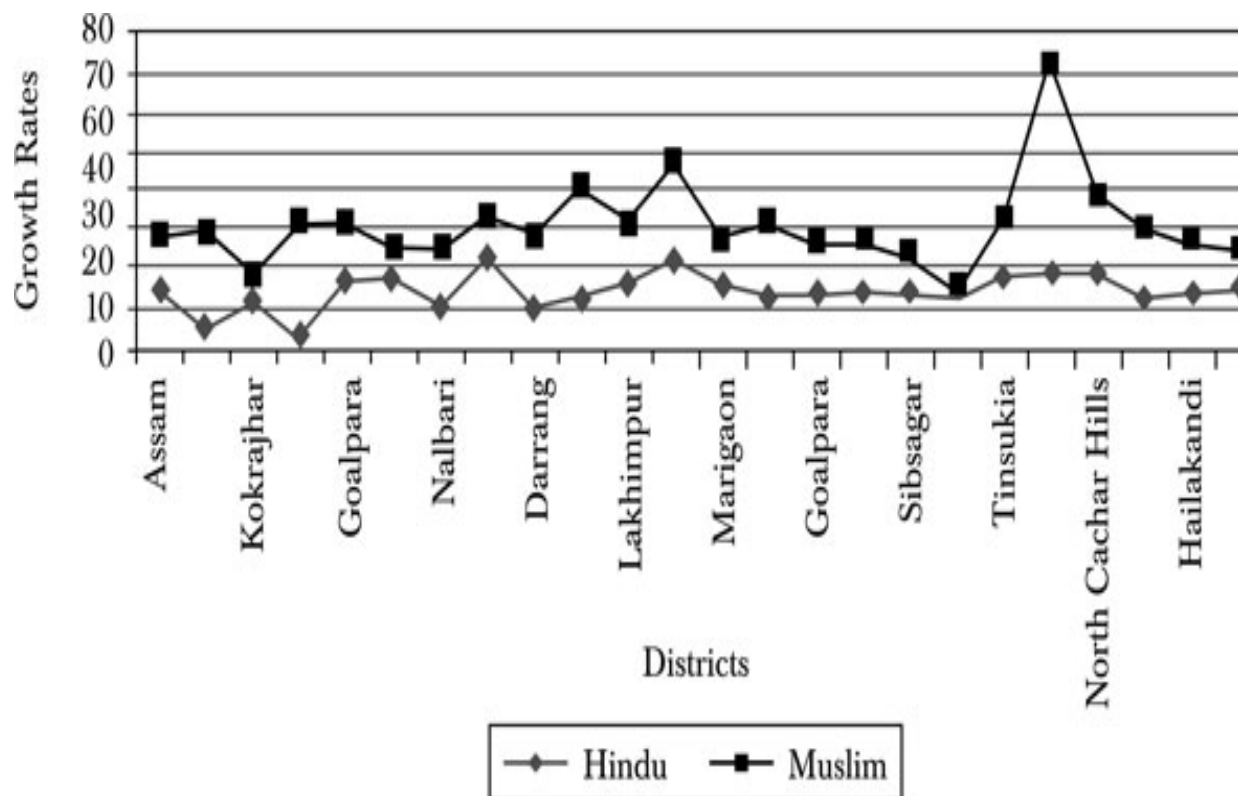
	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	
Assam		67.13	28.43	64.89	30.92
Dhubri		28.73	70.45	24.74	74.29
Kokrajhar		66.38	19.33	65.60	20.36
Bongaigaon		64.00	32.74	59.18	38.52
Goalpara		39.89	50.18	38.22	53.71
Barpeta		40.26	56.07	40.19	59.37
Nalbari		77.48	19.94	76.06	22.10
Kamrup		74.32	23.38	72.80	24.78
Darrang		60.54	31.98	57.74	35.54
Sanitpur		80.20	13.33	76.58	15.90
Lakhimpur		79.70	14.51	79.06	16.14
Dhemaji		93.87	1.49	95.95	1.84
Marigaon		54.56	45.31	52.21	47.59
Nogaon		51.73	47.19	47.80	50.99
Golaghat		86.12	7.11	85.94	7.91
Jorhat		98.03	4.55	92.86	4.77
Sibsagar		93.03	7.95	88.21	8.51
Dibrugarh		91.30	4.49	90.79	4.50
Tinsukia		90.18	3.13	89.49	3.48
Karbi Anglong		84.82	1.57	82.40	2.22
North Cachar Hills		72.92	2.21	69.91	2.48
Karimganj		50.15	49.17	46.70	52.30
Hailakandi		43.71	54.79	41.11	57.63
Cachar		63.42	34.49	61.37	36.13

Source: Estimated from Population by Religion, 1991 and 2001, Census of India, GoI.

Thus, certain districts and pockets are showing a tendency to have much higher Muslim population than others in Assam. While looking at the decadal growth rate of population in Assam during 1991 to 2001 in Figure 4.4, it clearly indicates higher Muslim growth rates than their counterpart of Hindu growth rate. As reported in the White Paper on Foreigners' Issue (Government of Assam 2002), the higher decadal population growth rate in Assam has been attributed to migration from outside the state. However, with several measures taken by the state government to curb cross-border migration, amongst other things, growth rate of population in 1991–2001 (18.9 per cent) and 2001–11 (16.9 per cent) census has shown a declining trend. The growth has been lower than national level which was 21.5 per

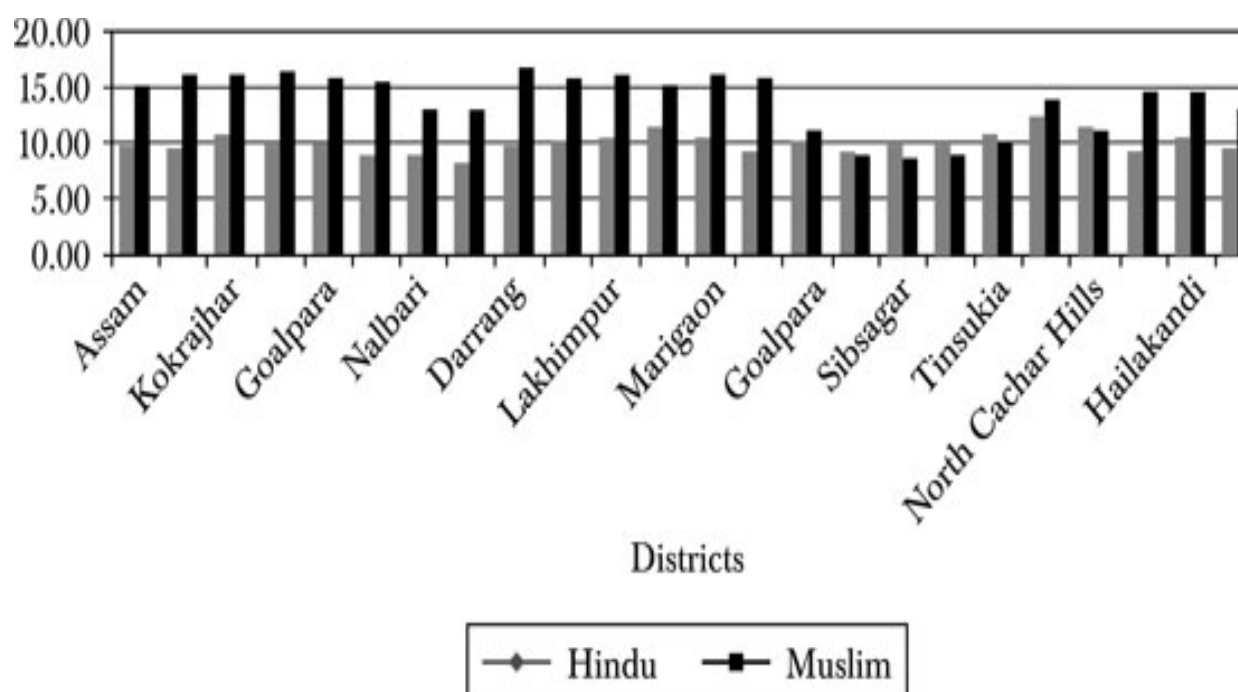
cent in 1991–2001 and 17.6 per cent in 2001–11 (ibid.: 38). However, with the availability of actual census data of 2011, the situation will be clearer.

Figure 4.4 Decadal Growth Rate of Population in Assam (1991–2001)



While looking at the share of population in 0–4 age group in Assam, it can be seen in Figure 4.5 that unlike West Bengal, some districts in Assam, such as Jorhat, Sibsagar and Dibrugarh, have marginally higher share of Hindu population though the rest have higher Muslim population share in 2001.

Figure 4.5 Percentage of 0–4 Age Group Population Distribution in Assam: 2001 (by Religion)



While looking at the percentage distribution of persons by religion in both rural and urban areas of some Indian states for the year 2004–5, one can find in Table 4.8 that except Jammu and Kashmir, Assam tops the list having maximum rural Muslim population of around 35 per cent followed by West Bengal with 31 per cent, much above the national figure which is 12 per cent. Whereas for the urban areas, Muslim population is not so high in both these states; rather Uttar Pradesh tops the list amongst these seven states of India. Thus, the immigrants are primarily concentrated in the rural sector of both Assam and West Bengal. It indicates that a bulk of this migrant population is unskilled and semi-skilled for the urban sector and, therefore, prefers to be in farming activities in the rural sector. ‘Vote bank’ politics, as pointed out by Mahendra Ved, in practice since Independence, has to a substantial level transformed the demographic map of the regions like Eastern India (2006: 85).

Table 4.8 Percentage Distribution of Persons by Religion (2004–5)

States	Rural		Urban	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
Assam		61.2	35.2	83.0
Bihar		85.7	13.8	84.4

Gujarat	91.2	7.4	83.2	13.1
Jammu & Kashmir	34.5	62.7	29.6	65.4
Karnataka	91.4	7.4	74.0	21.5
Uttar Pradesh	84.9	14.8	66.4	31.7
West Bengal	66.9	31.3	85.0	13.6
India	83.3	11.5	77.4	16.4

Source: NSS Report No. 521: Employment & Unemployment Situation among Major Religious Groups in India, 2004–5, GoI.

According to scholars such as Pramanik, such gradual demographic transition in the region has brought in security issues, social disharmony, and problem of fundamentalism (2005: 13). Such unaccounted migration has become a great concern in the border areas of both West Bengal and Northeastern states, as it has increased number of anti-social activities, disrupting the normal life and has posing security threat to the states. Communal disharmony has been generated due to infiltrators of different communities and their attacks on families in border areas (Datta 2004: 337). The other group of studies made by scholars also bring out certain positive findings and show that Bangladeshi infiltration to some extent has helped agriculture, and even certain unorganised and informal sectors of the economy of the borderlands like West Bengal, but at the same time has imposed local employment pressure on such sectors (Nath 2003; Datta 2004; Pramanik 2005). The findings show the impacts of such illegal migration in the following areas:

- (a) The inflow of population primarily consists of semi-skilled and unskilled labourers and thus is easily absorbed in the agricultural sector. Therefore, this sector has shown a sign of improvement; wherever the migrants have settled, the productivity has gone up since this population group is hardy and laborious.
- (b) The migrants being cheap labour are also easily absorbed in the household industry and in the unorganised sector. Therefore, sectors such as bidi, mat, pottery, carpet, candle, kantha stitch, santipuri tant, among others, have seen an increase in productivity due to such cheap migrant labourers. But this has, on the other hand, created pressure on existing labour force and has aggravated unemployment problems in the unorganised sector.

- (c) Infiltrators have created a pressure on natural resources through deforestation, land grab and illegal occupancy in various places. Also these immigrants have increased the slum areas and slum dwellers in various parts and have increased the density of occupation in several areas.
- (d) Unhygienic settlement has deteriorated the water condition and its supply, health scenario and its facilities, housing and sanitation condition and also the education scenario.
- (e) Though people cross the border with an intention to get hold of a permanent job, but in reality, they sometimes are forced to earn their livelihood from underground economy. Thus, the kind of underground occupations vary from smuggling to robbery, prostitution, beggary, trafficking of woman and children, which deteriorates the human security scenario.

In recent times, as found out in reports, this porous border has also been used by some underground outfits for procuring arms from Bangladesh. The consignments cross the international border to enter West Bengal through Lalgola in Murshidabad and Hili in South Dinajpur. The Bay of Bengal route via East Midnapore is also used for smuggling of arms from Bangladesh. The report of Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau, a Central Intelligence Agency shows at least four such consignments were sent to the rebel group through this route in the year 2010. The rebel group primarily bring self-loading rifles (SLR) and ammunitions, especially bullets of prohibited bores through this international border route and freshly posing threats to state's security issues (Biswas and Dutta 2010). Apart from arms and ammunitions, Biswas has further linked the supply of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN), which has its hub in Kolkata from the neighbouring nation Bangladesh. He mentions that at least 60 per cent of the total Indian fake currency comes through this porous border via West Bengal's two districts, Murshidabad and Malda and thus spreading 'economic terrorism' in India (Biswas 2010: 66–91). To encounter such issues and threats, which have a tendency to intensify having multi-dimensional impacts in the society and in the economy, a very stronger political resolution on border policy needs to be evolved.

Thus, cross-border activities like insurgency and other illegal activities with several socio-economic ramifications have remained very serious issue

in this region of India. The open and porous border remains the most fertile area for such activities. According to Saikia, the promotion of some right wing militancy with various cross-border connectivity and ISI link in state like Assam has made the scenario grave (Saikia 2004: 66–91). Citing a report on Assam back in 1999, Saikia (ibid.: 76) shows the nexus between ULFA and ISI in the state in the following areas:

- (a) Promoting indiscriminate violence in Assam by extending support to the local militants outfits.
- (b) Creating new militant outfits on the basis of ethnic and communal lines by instigating the local ethnic and religious groups.
- (c) Supplying explosive and advanced arms to terrorist groups.
- (d) Sabotaging oil pipelines and other installations, communication, railways, and roads.
- (e) Perpetuating communal tension between religious groups through wrong propagation.

Thus, with increasing fundamentalism and its cross-border linkage, this frontier is presently becoming complex and vulnerable with fresh challenges of militant activities, where many indigenous insurgent groups are gradually seeking more and more support from such right-wing fundamental groups and are becoming allied to such groups. Apart from this, many such right-wing groups have started operating powerfully and openly for their demand and rights in this region. As reported, after the major intra-community violence and bloodbath between Bodos and immigrant Muslims in Assam in July 2012, the Government of India has identified at least 14 such organisations in the state and five in Manipur. The groups includes Muslim Security Council of Assam, United Liberation Militia of Assam, Islamic Liberation Army of Assam, Muslim Volunteer Force, Muslim Liberation Army, Muslim Security Force, Islamic Sevak Sanng, Islamic United Reformation Protest of India, Revolutionary Muslim Commandos, Muslim Tiger Force, Muslim Liberation Front, Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, and Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam. In Manipur, the groups are Islamic National Front, Islamic Revolutionary Front, United Islamic Liberation Army, United Islamic Revolutionary Army, and People's United Liberation Front. It is important to understand their source of funds,

weapons, and the tactical operation of these outfits growth of fundamentalists groups in the region has become a renewed cause of concern for security agencies operating in the Northeast (*Northeast Today* 2012).

Another issue of illegal trade has been damaging the region's economy extensively. During my field trip to the states of the Northeast bordering Bangladesh in April 2011, I discovered that many of these bordering states have made a resurgence in restoring border relations, primarily in terms of legal trade with Bangladesh. This is visible after the change in political regime in Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. But the age-old practices of illegal activities are still in full force, and this possibly cannot be changed overnight. The idea of fencing such a huge open and porous boundary with wire, and having more rigorous para-military checkpoints and customs branches of both the governments in the sides of border for restricting such illegal activities are also progressing. Tripura, for example, has five legal trade points across the border, that is, Akhaura, Biloniya, Panisagar, Sonamura, and Dharmanagar. In all these legal trade points, a large volume of trade is going on with Bangladesh. Since Tripura is progressing fast with both economic and infrastructure development; therefore, the state is importing a large volume of related items from Bangladesh. Thus, stone chips, cements, bricks, and cutting machines are the most commonly imported items of border trade between Tripura and Bangladesh. Each such trade point receives an average of 100–50 loaded trucks, which enter Tripura every day. The monthly revenue collected by the land customs department varies between INR 30–40 lakh on the basis of dollar exchange rate. A report says that Tripura's border trade is growing very fast with Bangladesh. During 2009–10, Tripura's total volume of trade with Bangladesh was worth of INR 163.30 crore, out of which the volume of export was only INR 82 lakh. This trade volume is expected to increase more in the coming years (*Dainik Sangbad* 2011: 1). Such legal border trade began in this part of Northeast India in the 1980s and each such checkpoint has registered a good number of traders varying from 65 to 100 from Indian side. The legal trade takes place for the whole day in all these five legal checkpoints, which are made in the zero points of such border areas. All the checkpoints and trading activities are supposed to be closed at night and they are heavily guarded by the BSF. The legal border trade has generated net revenue worth of around INR 2,935 lakh in 2010–11 in the entire Northeast

from 20 land custom stations, out of which Indo-Bangladesh border trade volume is around INR 39,354 lakh, with Meghalaya contributing 64 per cent, and Tripura and Assam 18 per cent shares each.

But in my interaction with many border traders in Tripura, I found out that the real volume of trade begins after dusk, which is largely unaccountable. A huge volume of illegal border trade, illegal infiltration and arms deals takes place with the help of many of the paramilitary forces. According to many traders, the nexus between the illegal traders, para-military forces and political leaders have made the scenario of illegal activities across such borders extremely heinous and dreadful. Thus, goods like raw leather, processed tobacco, silk cloths, sugar, cattle heads, garments, and phensedyl cough linctus are some of the high-demand items in Bangladesh, which are exported illegally through these borders of Tripura. The volume and the level of profit of such illegal trade is almost double the volume of legal trade. But as reported by an officer from customs department in Muhurighat at Biloniya border, such illegal trade volume has declined over the years.

The other border areas of the Northeast also face similar issues. Tripura has reasonably remained successful in wire-fencing the borders with Bangladesh, but the states like Assam and Meghalaya, that share a very long border with Bangladesh are still exposed to open borders, and several illegal activities are happening in these border areas. For example, I was in Dawki–Tamabil border of Northeast’s Meghalaya and Bangladesh border area for my field trip, and found that this long border is still wide open and many of the dwelling houses in this area are partly in India and partly in Bangladesh, as was drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe during Partition. Cross-border illegal activities and trade are commonly practised in this region. I interviewed one of the richest traders of the Dawki area, Ms Doly Khongla. She mentioned about the largescale coal and limestone legal export business in this route since 1993. But the illegal items ranges from clothes, fish, dry fish, other food products, betel leaf, raw hides, and also gold. Plenty of Chinese goods are also imported illegally through this route. Further, unless positive actions are taken, the ISI, drug mafias and insurgent groups will keep this region perennially disturbed (*Dainik Sangbad* 2011: 1). A similar situation is seen in Mizoram, which shares a 722 km border both with Bangladesh and Myanmar. As reported, the Mizoram border is infested with insurgents, gunrunners and drug traffickers. The CAG report says that it is not only an

ill and fragile managed border, but also has great financial irregularities in the projects designed to fence the border and to usher development to this border areas of Mizoram. Also, there is an anomaly in non-identification of villages located 0–20 km from international borders in the plans of 2009–10, which obviated the very purpose of prioritising these villages and their development (*Hindustan Times* 2011: 13).

Plate 4.1 Border Security Force Personnel at Sonamura Checkpost, Tripura



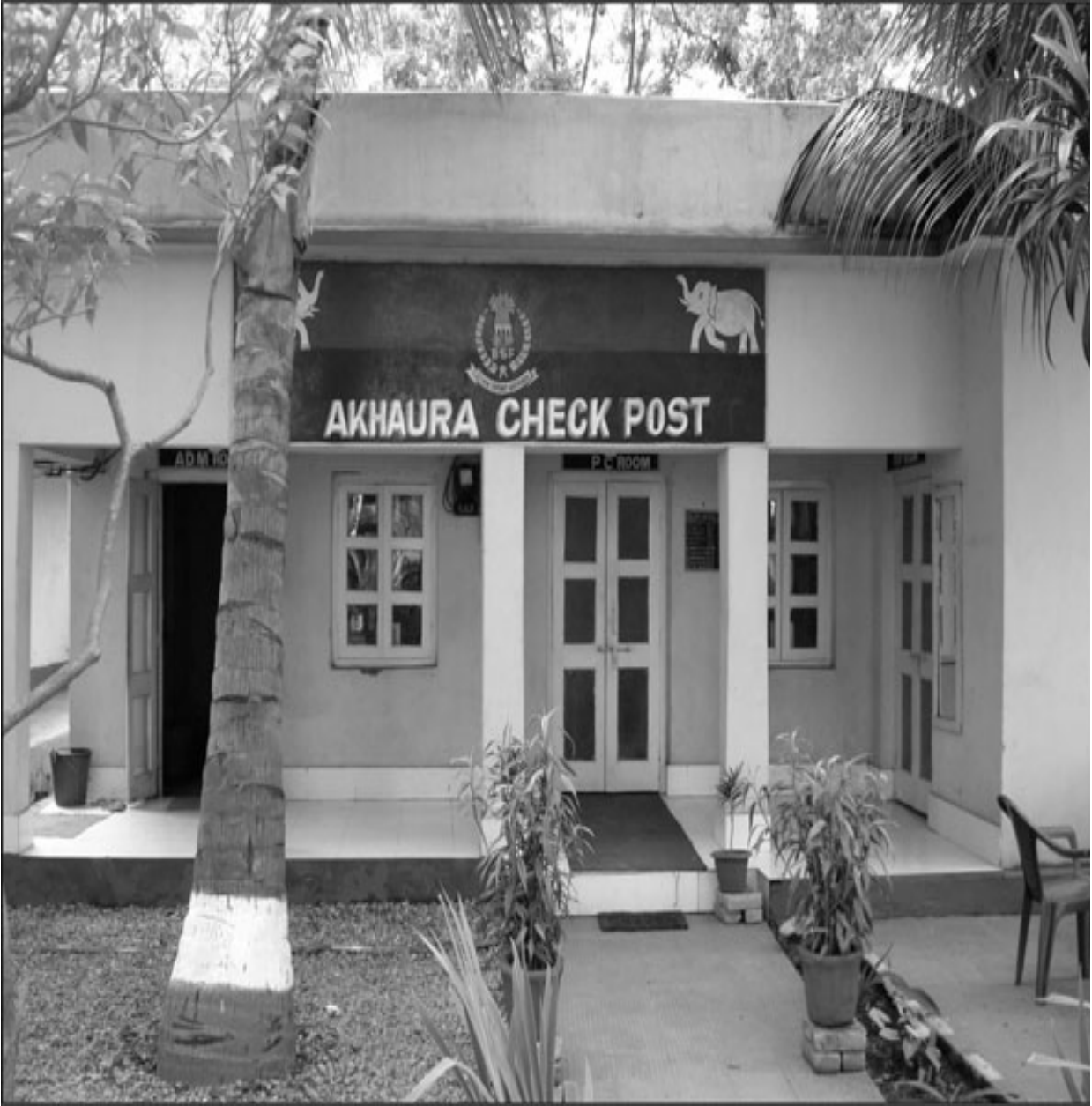
Plate 4.2 Trucks from Bangladesh Entering through Sonamura Checkpost, Tripura



Plate 4.3 Simantapur Land Customs Station, Tripura



Plate 4.4 Akhaura Checkpost, Tripura



International Border Villages: More Miseries on the Border

The recent initiative and attempt of the Government of India with the help of respective state governments of the frontier states to fence the border with wire has remained reasonably successful, and some of the small scale but regular cross border crimes like illegal crossing of border and earning the daily livelihood for a large section of unskilled Bangladeshis has drastically fallen. Also, regular activities like theft, crimes and fights across the border have gone down, which has brought some peace and relief to the people and

has improved the culture of legal trade, and number of tourist flows. But such wire-fencing has brought in different and new challenges to the people of this region. It has destroyed the livelihood, human security, freedom of movement and accessibility of thousands of villagers across the border of East and Northeast India. The Government of India has decided to construct wire-fencing through zero points, 150 m away from the Open International Border, drawn by the Radcliffe Commission back in 1947 without ever visiting the place and according to the agreement with Bangladesh government, no permanent construction is possible within the area. But this fence, which has been erected to check the age-old problems of infiltration and smuggling, has brought in a new set of threats and sufferings to the frontier people. Lives of thousands of people at the borders have been affected as wire fencing has crossed through their farming lands, and dwelling houses, their miseries are multiple now, not only with economic and security threats, but with serious identity crisis, as they are forced to survive on both the lands now. Studying their lives, Rekha Dixit has rightly said these frontier people now ‘breakfast in one country, work and lunch in another, and return home to dine and sleep. For people living on India’s dangerous and unforgiving borders, everyday is a challenge’ (Dixit 2010: 17).

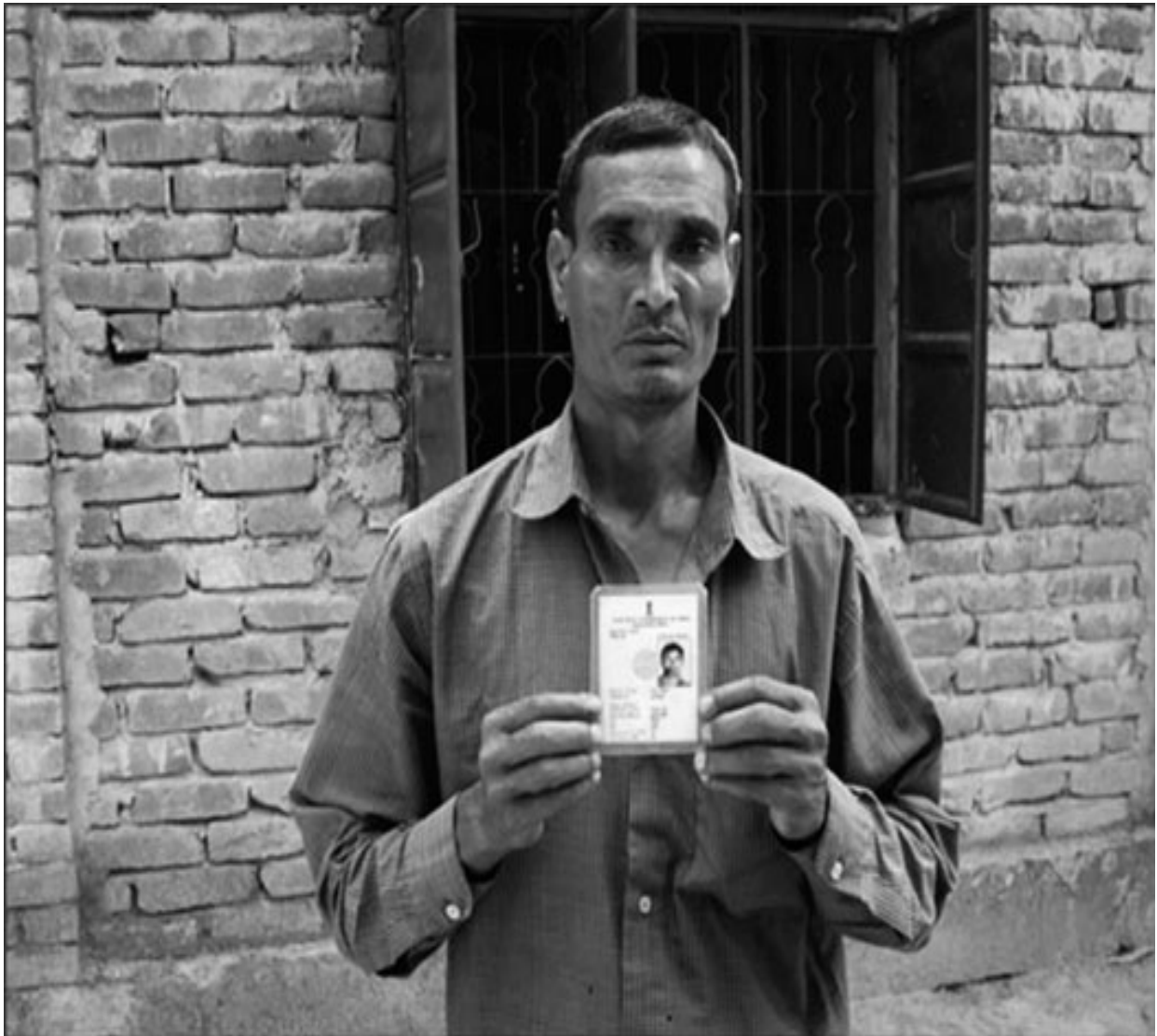
Plate 4.5 International Border Gate (IBG) in Himmatpur Village, Biloniya District, Tripura



As reported by a local daily in Tripura, such wire-fencing has affected more than 10,000 villagers, who are mostly farmers from Indian side, whose farming lands have gone to the other side of Bangladesh. These farmers have not received enough compensation for such terrible loss and displacement. So the overlapping decisions on wire-fencing of both the Centre at Delhi and the state of Tripura have victimised the poor villagers and their economic and human security at the border (*Dainik Sangbad* 2011). I have visited one such affected International Border Village (IBV) called Himmatpur in the Biloniya district of Tripura, where I have seen such terrible displacement and miseries of the inhabitants. During my interaction with the villagers, I was told that the farmers whose lands have gone to the other side during wire-

fencing were allowed to cross the border regularly in the morning hours to do farming activities in their lands in Bangladesh. They cross the border through the International Border Gates (IBG) along with their identity cards, given by the government after signing in the security register of the para-military forces. Himmatpur village is mostly dominated by Muslim households.²

Plate 4.6 Nur Mia, a victim of border fencing in Himmatpur Village, Tripura



This particular IBV currently consists of around 220 households, having no access to roads, electricity, water, and other basic amenities of life. The villagers have no medical and schooling accessibility.³ Children cannot go to

schools, which remain closed most of the time of the year; the students have nothing to do but loiter aimlessly, therefore, many of them have given up their studies. Apart from this, some schools on the zero-line were compelled to close down permanently. Every day the farmers cross the border through the IBG, and work on their land. The farmers are allowed to carry back the end products from their agricultural land to India for sustenance.⁴ Their struggle for identity and survival is multiplied due to the persistent threats from the armed forces and their constant harassments on various small issues. This group of villagers who live in isolation is frustrated and confused, and is eager to have a political platform, or to become a vibrant part in the society. But their voices are unheard by the policy-makers and are highly discriminated and marginalised from the mainstream socio-economic activity. Such a situation becomes an ideal ground for harvesting anti-social, communal and underground activities. Therefore, such groups, who are the victims of border fencing urgently need proper rehabilitation and compensation not only for their better living, but also for state security. Otherwise, some day, these frustrated villagers may become another underground militant group, having some other illegal cross border connectivity to further damage the peace and stability of the region.

Similar findings by Shib Shankar Chatterjee also bring out the level of sufferings of the people of such IBVs in Northeast borderland due to border issue and its fencing. His interaction with a young villager Nayan Khan in Jaipur, another IBV of West Tripura district reflects similar anger and disgust:

Partition has created peculiar demographic land problems. I am the inhabitant of the International Border Village. The front part of my house (where I sleep) lies in Indian territory, while my abode's hind part in Bangladesh. The Government of India wants to build the International Barbed Wire Border Fencing (IBWBF) on the courtyard of my house that lies on the international boundary to tackle the problems like illegal infiltration, smuggling, pan-Islamic religious fundamentalism, anti-Indian activities, insurgency and what not ... But, this is not the way; you never do such kind of things, which is not logical and precise. You have no right to divide our house, people, relatives, language, food, culture and dress. As a cultured person, I may

say, this has happened due to not only the drawing of an ‘illogical’ and ‘unscientific’ arbitrary line by the so-called British Engineer, Sir Cyril Radcliff, who divided the two nations (India and Pakistan) to create the two countries in the year — 1947, but also even, after the partition (that is, presently), when a section of so-called ‘engineer’ or ‘official’ of the Indian Central Public Works Department (ICPWD) have made the IBWBF without our proper consent, interest, safety and security! As a result, today, my paternal house is situated on the ‘zero-line’ area and my total house is outside of the IBWBF! I think it expresses the idiocy of a section of policy makers of the Indian Home Ministry Department, who have suggested and sanctioned the IBWBF as well. The contractors and the so-called officials want to build the IBWBF only because of making easy and quick money, and nothing else. It’s as simple as that without proper check and verify how they can erect it? While it shows the lacks of the importance of the socio-economic-cultural system of our society. It’s really not only unfortunate for us but also painful. My family and I are required to cross the international borderline many a times a day in order to enjoy my home life. Beside, me, there are many such other peoples of our hamlet that lie on the international border too, who are compelled to use this ‘movement’ (that is, cross and re-cross the international border) or carry out their works properly in several times a day. Because, half of our IBV houses or kitchens or bedrooms or toilets have on Bangladesh territory and the rest of the Indian sides. Now, let me tell, what can I/we do? I/we can’t leave my native place or motherland, whatever you called. So, in this context, if anybody call me/us Bangladeshi, yes; I/we are Bangladeshi and I/we are proud of that ... Ok, if you think it is good for our society and the country as well, we will certainly welcome it. But, you have to first relocate us properly and then provide us compensation against our lands (Chatterjee 2009).

Such border fencing has invited a new set of complex challenges in this border area of Northeast India. As argued by Arunaday Saha, such activities and movement of people across this border are unabated. He feels such artificial border and fence cannot divide the people of the two countries, as they have strong emotional and psychological relations with each other

along with an inter-dependent economy of Tripura and Bangladesh (Dixit 2010: 20). In some other border areas of Tripura, villagers have resisted fencing vehemently, and violently protested against such border fencing. According to a local daily report, in various parts of Sonamura border area, which is the 'haven for illegal trade', a largescale fights, protests and bloodsheds have taken place against this issue of wire fencing between the villagers and the NBCC workers. This corridor is a haven for the people who earn crores of profit through illegal trade and affect the legal trade earnings of the Government of India. Thus, as reported, the items of illegal trade in this corridor are branded alcohol, drugs, cloths, gold and other addicted items like phensedyl. Even the underground militants and insurgents have access to this route (Dixit 2010: 20).

Similar is the situation in other International Border Villages of the states like Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and West Bengal. Some of the genuine grievances brought out by Chatterjee during his interaction with International Border Villagers in Assam reflect their desperate mindset. They feel that, they are now living like foreigners in Indian soil having a 'life of deprivation', and government seems to have forgotten that few of those across the IBWBF are their responsibility. The IBG, which have become so relevant for these villagers now remain open for a fixed time period a day and sometimes also depends upon the wishes of the BSF personnel, which largely has affected the economic activities of these villagers. The farmers cannot reap their crops or save their cattle and properties due to 144-Cr PC law which remain in force near the international boundary from sunset to sunrise. As a result, the Bangladeshis often steal their crops, cattle and properties. Life in these IBVs have become very difficult, full of miseries and abnormalities. People cannot move freely and are almost under 'house-arrest'. In the name of protecting their lives, International Frontier Guard (IFG) creates tremendous fear and pressure on them (ibid.).

According to Chatterjee, migration in these border areas cannot possibly be arrested by any 'law', 'force' and 'protest', as it has become a natural process. Even this international wire-fencing cannot bring any permanent solution to this problem. Thus, every day after sunrise, hundreds of people who reside in the towns/areas on the Indo-Bangladesh international border regions, cross the border to earn their daily wages. As he interacted with the local villagers of International Border Village, it was revealed that, presently

some ‘new’ settlements of Bangladeshi Muslims are seen in the extreme points of the international border zones constantly, who not only help to incite the illegal infiltration, but also help to buck up the anti-social works like smuggling, fanatic religious fundamental activities, anti-Indian activities here. It has now become more forceful and regular process (Chatterjee 2009). Thus the international fencing has neither brought any permanent solution to cross-border illegal activities, nor could it solve the emerging dilemmas and uncertainties of the people on the border land. The condition of such unfortunate citizens of these International Border Villages has not really been addressed politically, primarily because they do not wield any political clout and their number is not adequate to influence any equilibrium of political power. It is as rightly pointed out by Chatterjee that this is another pathetic consequence of ‘illogical’ and ‘unscientific’ drawing of the IBWBF by the so-called ‘engineer’ or ‘official’ of the ICPWD after the post-Partition demarcation by the British government. Such border fencing today has brought new set of challenges like acquisition of land for building the long IBWBF and IBR for preventing illegal infiltration and putting the border people in more miseries (Chatterjee 2009). Since such action has threatened the existence of thousands of villagers in frontier areas, so the people naturally have expressed their protests and anger against such fencing. It is a fact that in March 2006, Meghalaya state government temporarily had to suspend the IBWBF work following protests by the indigenous tribal peoples in the Khasi Hills district and the Jaintia Hills Districts of the State as their villages have fallen on the outside of the international boundary. As estimated by Chatterjee, more than 4–5 crore of people are now living on the India–Bangladesh international boundary and are challenged and faced with the issues of security, lack of economic opportunities, and livelihood threats. Chatterjee (2009), therefore, is of the opinion that the Government of India needs to address it immediately in a proper way to avoid any further dire consequences from this Eastern and Northeastern front. He proposes measures — both pro-people and by strengthening and sealing the border areas — to restrict future threats:

- (a) Finding ‘Constitutional Safeguards’ for ethnic population;
- (b) Issuing immediate National Identity Cards (NIC) and Voter Identity Cards (VIC) with photographs;

- (c) Sealing the International Border with electrified border fencing 24×7, in line with the country's western boundary;
- (d) Handing over the International Border to the Indian Army and by keeping a strict vigil round-the-clock;
- (e) Setting up floodlights near the International Border Outpost (IBOP) manned by the BSF jawans;
- (f) Both India and Bangladesh need joint patrolling to understand and solve each other's problems or difficulties.

Along such measures, there needs to be a broader policy measure representing the voices of this victimised group of people to derive a permanent solution to such problems, by drawing a methodology on relocating and rehabilitating the people and having a better border gate management concept. While keeping an open forum for the Northeast region in terms of increasing constructive engagements with Bangladesh, India persistently needs to look for a strong political dialogue and better diplomacy, which can also find a durable solution to the people of these isolated border villages in these states. The great hope on the newly-elected Sheikh Hasina government that is presently sweeping across India can see a vista for such perpetual border issues.

Changing Bangladesh and Hope for India: The Post-Sheikh Hasina Scenario

For a very long period, India's political equation with Bangladesh was not compatible. The right-wing affiliation along with Islamist ideology of parties like Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, who ruled Bangladesh for a long period of time has remained apathetic for India and its Northeast and East. Their direct and indirect support and persistent help to various insurgent and anti-national groups of Northeast India have aggravated the security scenario of the region. But Bangladesh with her re-elected government of Awami League in the year 2008 after so many years have ushered new hopes not only to the masses of Bangladesh but also to the citizens of India, who eagerly wants a permanent solution to its East and Northeastern borderlands through a proper solution to the border disputes, deeper understanding and better economic friendship. Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina has brought the phase of 'Din Bodol' and in all speculation would not dishearten such desire of India. Her sweeping victory as mentioned by Hiranmay Karlekar in the year 2008 in Bangladesh's general election has a historic significance not only to her own nation but also to her neighbouring nations. The political ideology of Awami League is committed to secularism and democracy, which has the mandate to curb terrorist activities, religious fundamentalism, injustice to minority groups and anti-India propaganda. The rendition of Arabinda Rajkhowa of ULFA and other leaders of insurgents groups of Northeast India speaks eloquently of her intentions (Karlekar 2011). Awami League's victory again in the 2014 general elections is reassuring as it ratifies that the transition process towards democracy in Bangladesh would continue and India's borderland also can move forward positively with more hope and engagements. This is the most significant time for India to transform her East and Northeast scenario with the help of a congenial Bangladesh government and look for a solution to the problems of security and underdevelopment faced by the frontier people of India. Government of Bangladesh has already expressed various collaborative and constructive engagement proposals along with areas like open border trade, cultural ties, deeper political understanding. Both Bangladesh and India, especially her borderlands have developed reasonable goodwill and understanding through their people-to-people contacts, citizenship programmes and many cultural and tourism connectivity. The Awami League government has widely acknowledged the immense contribution and support of Indian citizens, especially from West Bengal and Tripura during the Liberation War by bestowing honours to many distinguished members and thus further strengthening bilateral relations. As rightly pointed out by Indrani Bagchi,

Bangladesh is an important neighbour to India's East. It is not competition; Bangladeshis are fellow travelers in the journey to prosperity. We are a big country, a rising power, we can learn to give a little. We don't want them to fall into the clutches of either the Chinese or the Islamists. They should be made India's gateway to Southeast and East Asia. Let us rethink our neighbourhood (2011).

India, therefore, needs to support various economic and development projects of Bangladesh as it does for the other neighbour like Bhutan, which not only does capacity building for that nation but also builds confidence in the relationship between the two. Thus, for example, the issue of Teesta River water sharing between northwest Bangladesh and eastern India's West Bengal can lead to a better irrigation solution to the agricultural crisis of Bangladesh and address the food security issue. Also, as pointed out by Suryanarayanan, as future water demand is expected to increase significantly in both the countries, such transborder water sharing would play a crucial role in water resources management. In the future, water-related disputes are likely to surface frequently unless steps are taken to prevent such issues. Any form of conflict over water resources will only lead to waste of time and resources further exacerbating socio-economic problems in both the countries. Thus, both the nations can undertake appropriate joint initiatives to build reservoirs upstream of the Teesta River in India and within Bangladesh to store the excessive water during the rainy season for utilisation during the dry season. In addition, an integrated flood management programme has to be planned and implemented during the rainy season and summer months when there is a higher frequency of normal and flash floods. This needs to be extended to include the Teesta River exclusively in order to pre-vent economic damage of crops and livelihoods (Suryanarayanan 2010). Thus, to build and contextualise better and stable economic, cultural, social as well as political dynamics of East and Northeast India, one needs to go beyond such political boundaries and needs many such friendly and progressive collaborations with transnational neighbours, so that territorial border disputes and cross-border challenges can find lasting solution in years to come. This alone can provide a solution to security concerns of this frontier region of India.

NOTES

1. IMDTA was introduced in the Indian Parliament in 1983 by the Congress government headed by Indira Gandhi. It narrates the procedure to detect illegal migrants, especially from Bangladesh to the bordering state of Assam, who entered India on and after 25 March 1971 without any valid passport/travel document/legal authority. For other states such detection is done under the

Foreigner Act 1946. The IMDTA was to provide for the establishment of tribunals for determination in a fair manner of an illegal migrant, to enable the central government to expel him/her from India.

2. A farmer named Nur Mia has narrated that ever since the wire-fencing was done around four years back, they have been struggling for survival, and are exposed severely to many human security issues. They also suffer immensely from identity crisis. A mere amount of INR 28,000 per household was given by the government as a part of compensation.
3. The nearest PHC and school is in a district town Kathalia, with a distance of six km, without any transport network. Due to lack of schooling facilities, the enrolment ratios as well as the dropout rates are very high in such villages, as told by Abdul Rajjak, the only school teacher of that area.
4. During my course of interaction, the only History honours graduate Dilu Mia of that village has expressed his anger and worries for not having any avenues and opportunities to earn his livelihood in this border village of Tripura.

5

‘Nepal Issue’ in India’s East and Northeast

CHANGING NEPAL

Nepal, which was a small independent Hindu Kingdom in the Himalayan range of mountains, has made a historic transition from its 240-years-old monarchy. The country, ruled as a ‘Hindu state’, made a shift by a seven-party coalition, including the Maoists, who won the overwhelming majority in the Nepal’s Constituent Assembly election to declare it as a ‘secular state’ on 18 May 2006. As pointed out by Dahal, the mass movement took place in April 2006 in the country to restore the process for both parliament for democracy and peace with an end of a 10-year-long armed conflict. This necessitated the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) to join democratic forces and to form a constitutional devise to manage root causes of conflicts afflicting the nation. Hence, a Constituent Assembly election was seen as the compromising solution among all the political forces for finding a way for an inclusive state response to social diversity and sustainable peace. Subsequently in November 2006, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between an alliance of the seven political parties (six after the merger of Nepali Congress and Nepali Congress-Democratic) and the CPN (Maoist). The ruling seven-party alliance (SPA) announced substantive structural reforms, such as declaration of the country as secular, federal and republican. There were also other reform measures such as greater inclusiveness regarding marginalised people in the Constituent Assembly, the bureaucracy and police to transform the ‘structural causes of conflicts’. The political transition has remained highly turbulent due to the open-ended nature of the conflict system. It is therefore as mentioned by Dahal hard to say whether Nepal has actually entered a post-conflict phase (Dahal 2012).

Till the 1950s, Nepal was commonly known as the 'Forbidden Land' due to its very controlled and oligarchic nature of politics. As mentioned by Prakash A. Raj, till 1950, the country was being ruled by the Rana oligarchy, which was followed by a revolution in which the people of Nepal and King Tribhuvan were successful in overthrowing the Ranas and bringing democracy to the country. The Indian government extensively supported the democratic forces in Nepal, and in the 1950s India had paramount influence not only in international relations but also in domestic affairs of Nepal (Raj 2006). Nepal had her first parliamentary election in the year 1958, and B. P. Koirala became the Prime Minister of the country, but later King Mahendra dismissed him in December 1960 and took over. King Mahendra also introduced the Panchayat System in the year 1962 under which powers were concentrated in the monarchy and other political parties were banned. But Nepal, at that period, had opened up by establishing diplomatic relations with many countries and exchanged residential diplomatic missions in Kathmandu and their respective capitals. India even during this monarchy continued to regard its relations with Nepal as being 'special'. King Birendra then succeeded his father King Mahendra in 1972 and attempted to gather international support to declare Nepal as a 'Zone of Peace'. Meanwhile, the popular movement against the Panchayat system gathered momentum, and the King had to dismantle the party-less system and transfer the sovereignty to the Parliament in 1990. There was an elected Government of Nepali Congress and the beginning of new millennium in Nepal was marked by two events, which later affected the country profoundly. The first was the royal massacre in June 2001 when Crown Prince Dipendra, who supposedly committed suicide, massacred the entire family of King Birendra including the Queen. His brother Prince Gyanendra succeeded him. The second was the growth of the Maoist insurgency in the country, which has deep rooted causes and consequences in the country (ibid.). Nepal, therefore, has been passing through several political transitions and challenges.

Such transitions and post-conflict issues of Nepal have substantial transnational consequences and impacts, especially on India, who is her close neighbouring nation, and who shares an age-old cross cultural, social and ethnic spaces and identities along with the long and open geographical border with her. Thus, according to Raghavan, as there is free movement across the borders, therefore the internal conflicts in Nepal have the high

possibility to aggravate cross-border activities and tension, and can facilitate the movement of various mafia groups, drug trafficking and non-state activities. As the control of cross border activities remains difficult, it can lead to serious cross border implications (Raghavan 2011).

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIA–NEPAL BORDER FROM EAST AND NORTHEAST INDIA’S PERSPECTIVE

Nepal is a geographically landlocked country and is located at an altitude varying between 70 m and 8,884 m, bordering two Asian giants — India and China. The border of this country as mentioned by Hans is special for three reasons. First of all, Nepal is surrounded by land (all 3,222 km of its frontier) and has no access to sea. This landlocked status has great impacts on Nepal’s economy and necessarily has to be dependent on both of her neighbours. Second, Nepal’s two neighbouring countries have the biggest population in the world. Nepal’s northern Himalayan region borders the Tibetan autonomous region of China, in the south, east and west it is surrounded by the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim. Thus, the eastern boundary of Nepal is bordered by Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of India’s West Bengal, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar demarcate the southern part of Nepal. Twenty-two districts in Nepal’s southern plains bordering India constitute the Terai or Madhesh. Third, it has an open border with India, which allows people of both the countries to cross the border without visa and to carry goods for everyday usage across without paying customs. Due to such open border interactions, besides sharing economic relations, the bordering people of both India and Nepal also have maintained close relations in this frontier with cultural and social ties (Hans 2009).

India’s strategic land route to Assam, passing between Bangladesh in the south and Sikkim and Bhutan in the north, touches the southeast corner of Nepal at this point (Jha 1984: 19; Datta 2002). This long 1,700 km Indo-Nepal open border thus has been facilitating several socio-cultural continuities to co-exist in harmony, which dates back to centuries. Such harmonious co-existence through the movement of people between the two nations without any geographical restrictions has strengthened their age-old historical ties. But much before the advent of British in South Asia and their establishment as rulers in India, there existed various big and small

kingdoms in both India and Nepal, which were at many times shaped and reshaped through conquest and conspiracies. This had resulted in several shifts and redrawing of state boundaries, though there is very little evidence of any serious border disputes between the nations and those surrounded by India and Nepal (Upreti 2009: 122). Several historical facts also substantiate that Nepal has predominantly remained close to Indian culture, religion, matrimonial and ethnic relations. From the 3rd century BCE till about the 14th century CE, Lumbini of Nepal (the birth place of Lord Buddha) was regularly visited by a large number of people from India and in the post-Mauryan period, both the nations even have promoted commercial activities. Between the 10th and 13th centuries, when Muslim invasion was shaking Northern India, many Hindu kings fled to Nepal, which reinforced and strengthened their religious ties between the nations. Similar existence of many other ties between the nations has made it imperative for the policy-makers of that period to keep the borders open, but with the identity of separate sovereign nations with distinct political entity (Pattanaik 2000). However, due to the persistent flows of people across the borders from time immemorial, various levels of assimilation of tribes and communities had taken place over time. It is said that many Nepali ethnic groups belong to Kirata stock and their migration to the east was just an extension of their eastern habitat, and become closer to tribal people of Assam, who were easily acceptable in the region in the earlier days (Nath 2003: 212). On the other hand, historian S. C. Boruah mentions that the tribe community called Limbu of Nepal was the original tribe of Brahmaputra Valley. He states that 'according to one version based on a Limbu legend of creation, they are original inhabitants of Cachar country, the name given by the Nepali people to the foothills region lying between the Brahmaputra and the Kosi rivers' (Bhandari 2003: 107). Thus, in the ancient days, some historians feel that Nepal was culturally, geographically and ethnically close to the Northeastern state Assam. It is also said that a large part of Nepal was under Kamrupa, the older name of Assam. In Yogini Tantra, as pointed out by Bhandari, it is mentioned that

from the mountain of Karatoya to Dikkarasini the confluence of the Brahmaputra from Karatoya to Dikkarasini the northern limit in the mount Kanya, in the West the Karatoya in the East Diksu, O daughter

of the Mountains! In the south the confluence of Lakse with the Brahmaputra; this is the territory which all treaties call by the name of Kamrupa (ibid.).

Assam's relation with Nepal also is rooted in matrimonial alliances, fostering pre-colonial migration here. Thus, Nepal had historically a close tie with Assam and had encouraged migration through many such means in the pre-colonial period.

The colonial conquest of the Assam valley later had opened up the region to Nepali highlanders. Nepali migration continued and increased during colonial time with different purposes. The colonial power required a pliant labour force to clear the forest lands for lumbering, settlement and tea plantation, and Nepali migrants provided the perfect fit. Besides granting wastelands on favourable terms and giving pecuniary assistance for their journey to Upper Assam, the Nepalis were even encouraged to settle in the districts of Lakhimpur, Darrang and Kamrup. They, in turn, provided manpower to the expanding colonial economy in the region and also began their own economies as pastoralists and marginal farmers, ex-soldiers with good peasant and military discipline, artisans and semi-skilled professionals (Sinha 1982: 226–27). Since Nepali workforce was readily available as agricultural labourers, dairy farmers, porters, carpenters, blacksmiths, construction workers, they were acceptable to both rulers and local communities in the region (Nath 2003: 210).

Similarly, many Nepalis have migrated to Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal to be employed in several tea gardens in that area. Also as Sikkim was under Nepali domination since 1775, and only in 1861, it became a British protectorate, which explains substantial Nepali settlement in that area. Many Nepali labourers were taken to Sikkim for working in various developmental works undertaken by the British government (Pattanaik 2000). Thus, permanent migration accelerated after the 1850s with the first major Nepali inflow to the virtually unpopulated areas in Darjeeling district of West Bengal and then to southwest section of Sikkim in late 19th century, who wanted hard labour for tea plantations and thus facilitated Nepali migration to Darjeeling. While narrating such Nepali migration to this region, Leo E. Rose mentioned that:

The first major Nepali migration was into the virtually unpopulated areas of Darjeeling district of Bengal, from there, into the southwest section of Sikkim in the late 19th century. This input of Nepalis was sponsored and indirectly at least, organised by the British who were then in the process of establishing tea plantations in Darjeeling that required a labour force capable of working in a steep hill area, as well as a non-Buddhist community in Sikkim that could serve as a counter to what the British perceived to be a pro-Tibetan Buddhist polity in that state that would not co-operate with British policies designed to ‘open up’ Tibet. The Nepalis fitted both criteria admirably and became the critical factor in the tremendous expansion of both the Darjeeling and Sikkimese economies from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. By 1900, Nepalis had become the majority community in both Darjeeling and Sikkim, although not the dominant force politically (Baruah 2004).

[Plate 5.1](#) Mim Tea Garden, Darjeeling



Such immigrant groups gradually became the critical actors in the expansion of the economies of Darjeeling and Sikkim. By 1900, interestingly the Nepalis formed more than 50 per cent of the total population in Sikkim and Darjeeling, strong enough in the past century to form a government and demand a separate homeland (Nath 2005: 63). Apart from economic reasons, the colonial rulers also deployed a large number of Nepali people in Gorkha regiment. Once in the regiment, they were not encouraged by the Nepal government to go back to the country and alternatively were encouraged by the British to settle in several places of India like Dharamshala, Bakloh, Darjeeling, Dehradun, and Shillong. Thus, such process of Nepali migration to this region and their subsequent settlement began two centuries ago with British imperial penetration in the local economy and recruitment of Gorkha soldiers in the British Indian Army. Such recruitment centres were established in the border towns of Gorakhpur and Ghoom (Darjeeling) and Nepali-villagers then enlisted and began to migrate towards India. Nepali speaking people are now settled in scattered way in all the states of Northeast and East India. Such an inflow of people during the British period over the years from Nepal to India has gradually started changing the landscape of the border regions of India, mostly in East and Northeast, and gradually disrupted the pre-colonial alliance based on socio-cultural ties.

Along such shift in the purpose of migration of Nepali community during the consolidation of British power, the idea and purpose of border between Nepal and India also started shifting along with British interest. Thus, the boundary demarcation of Nepal and India was re-shaped during British period after the Anglo-Nepal War in 1814–16 and the Treaty of Sagauli. This was another turning point in the history of this subcontinent and specifically to Nepal as it delineated and demarcated its southern boundary with India (Upreti 2009: 123). During the pre-colonial period, King Prithvinarayan Shah of the Gorkha principality, who founded the kingdom of Nepal in 1769, tried to expand his kingdom both in the north and south of Nepal. So along with a process of annexation and assimilation, he had followed an expansionist policy after the consolidation of the kingdom of Nepal. He failed in the north but succeeded in the south and extended their rule in Kumaon and Garhwal and up to the Sutlej River in the west and Teesta River in the east. It was only in the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–16 and the

subsequent Sagauli treaty that Nepal lost the occupied territories (Upreti 2009: 123). Thus, the history of territorial expansion of Nepal towards its east, that is Sikkim, and the idea of creating a Greater Nepal came to an end in 1814, when British India declared war against Nepal due to a dispute on the authority over Butwal, a city in today's central Terai district Rupandhi in Nepal. Nepal lost the war and had to sign the Sagauli treaty in November 1815 after big military pressure of the British army on Nepal's capital Kathmandu. With this treaty Nepal had to cede the territories in the west of the River Mahakali and the whole Terai and the plain land in south Nepal to the East India Company along with the territories in the east of River Mechi to Sikkim. Later, the East India Company restored parts of the Terai back to Nepal and the present border became fixed (Pandey 1995). Eventually, the British government's formal recognition of Nepal as a sovereign independent nation under the treaty of 1923 had led to the opening of Terai region and border for three prime reasons:

- (a) To encourage the free movement of people across national boundaries as there was the need of Nepali labour to work in the British tea estates, various other development projects, and recruitment in the armed forces.
- (b) There were business and commercial interests. British and Indian businessmen were interested in access to Nepali markets. Similarly, the open border could facilitate the supply of Nepali raw materials, particularly forest-based ones.
- (c) The British were also interested in the free access to the Nepal Himalayas for surveys, expeditions and trekking (Upreti 2009: 124).

Jung Bahadur Rana of Nepal then made conscious efforts to clear such demarcation and delineation of the border with British India. But the actual survey work of this border was undertaken much later in 1926–27 by the Geological Survey of India and the first aerial mapping of the border took place. Boundary pillars were erected at definite distances all over this open border, and it was decided that supervision and survey would take place at regular intervals. Maintenance of these boundary pillars was shared by both British–Indian and Nepal administration, which continued even after Independence. Much later in the post-Independence period, in 1981 the

Indo-Nepal Boundary Commission was constituted, where it was decided to hold two meetings a year on various issues related to border and its disputes. There was never any serious boundary dispute between these two nations, except for the Kalapani region that was raised in Nepal in mid 1990s (Upreti 2009: 123). Thus, unlike the Nepal–China boundary, which dates back much earlier, Nepal–India boundary is a comparatively recent origin as its present boundary demarcation and delimitation took place only after the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814–16. The long border of over 1,700 km, which runs along three sides of Nepal, is 465 km longer than the Nepal–China boundary. The mountainous portions of the boundary lie in Sikkim state and Darjeeling district of West Bengal state in east India, while rest of the boundary runs along the plains in the south and along the Mahakali River in the west (Kansakar 2001: 12).

Much later during the post-Independence period in 1950, India signed a fresh treaty with Nepal for their mutual ties and co-operation. Thus, with the signing of the bilateral Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950, Nepal and independent India have continued to share an ‘open border’ policy as per this agreement for a deeper socio-cultural, economic and political relations between them. Thus, it can be argued that the present border demarcation and the mutual relations of Nepal and India are based on two major treaties, one is with its colonial Sagauli treaty, which has fixed the location and mapped the border across Terai. The other is with its post-colonial Peace and Friendship Treaty, which has agreed to negotiate on Terai, where freedom of movement, natural trade and economy could be restored (Hans 2009). The Treaty of Peace and Friendship further allows both the Nepalis and Indians to travel and work across the border, who are to be treated at par with the native citizens of both the sides (Bhattraï 2007). Also, unlike the colonial treaty of 1923, which used to govern the Anglo-Nepalese relations, this post-colonial treaty has interlocked Nepalese economic and security interests with those of India (Deepak 2005: 451). Thus, there was a huge contextual difference in these two treaties of colonial and post-colonial periods, which re-shaped the relations between these two nations and changed most heavily the destiny of many people around the bordering regions of two nations. Deepak has argued that though China also is a very close and important neighbour for Nepal, yet the sheer reality of India’s cultural, geographical and economic proximity with Nepal drove home the Chinese policy-makers

that it was almost difficult to replace India's role in Nepal's economic development (2005: 452). And the Terai region of Nepal, which is an extension of the Indo-Gangetic plains, plays the most important role in India–Nepal relations. So Terai has provided the religious, cultural and ethnic affinities between the inhabitants there and their counterparts across the border. It has remained an expansion of the Indian society and economy through the centuries. Thus, a huge number of Indian-born population are present in Terai, as much as 77.6 per cent of its total population (Pattanaik 2000). Economy of Terai has been viewed as an extension of the Indian economy, largely due to the nature of economic dependence among the people of the bordering region. The people of Terai have more socio-cultural interaction with the neighbouring Indians as compared to the people of Nepalese hilly areas (Upreti 2009: 132). Thus the idea of open border across this region was perceived freshly in post-colonial time to restore and then maintain a harmonious and natural economic relation between the people across the borders, which over time also extended to socio-cultural relations that were prevalent during pre-colonial period. The statement of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at a press conference in 1961 further clarifies this: 'Indo-Nepal relations do not depend on any person's goodwill, on Nepal's goodwill, on that government or this government. They depend on geography and history which cannot be easily done away with' (Behera 2011).

NEPAL AND ITS CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

To understand the present India–Nepal cross border relations and issues, and its impact on development and security in India's borderlands, it is essential to understand the contemporary Nepal, which is confronted with several challenges and crises. The country has been facing with problems of both nation-building as well as state-building and is currently exposed to various complex issues due to its multiple political transitions (UNDP 2009: 84):

- (a) Shifting from monarchy to republic;
- (b) Getting away from authoritarianism to democracy and human rights;
- (c) Changing from a hegemonic to a participatory system of governance;
- (d) Attempts at secularism from a state wholly pervaded by one religion;

- (e) Prioritising from a heavily centralised unitary system to one characterised by decentralisation and autonomy.

As pointed out by the *Nepal Human Development Report*, the country presently faces the major challenge of squaring the recognition of diversity with the benefits of the nation-state (2009: 86). Most recently, that is, in May 2012, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, formed in the year 2006 with an enormous hope was a disappointing end to a promising process, which began in 1996 with the People's War to abolish the monarchy and transform Nepal with an ambitious federal state structure (EPW 2012: 9). This has added fresh chaos within the country. Rob Johnson thinks that a weak economy, unemployment, illiteracy, ethnic division, religious antagonism and a rapid growth rate in the population have actually exacerbated the contemporary problems and disturbed political harmony within Nepal (Johnson 2006: 61). The political landscape of Nepal got exposed in the year 2001 after the assassination of King Birendra, followed by the civil unrest and violence, which erupted within the country. Along with this, the Maoist trail in Nepal and its violence against the government had to a large extent destabilised the country. It naturally had to disrupt its economic development to a large extent. Thus, as narrated by Dahal (2012), an erosion of state monopoly on power, taxation and loyalty of citizens, growth of competitive violence and failure of statehood in governance have confiscated the state's capacity to provide security in the country. As a result, the ability of the political system to maintain balance of power between different governance organs is severely undermined which is telling on its capacity to enforce rule of law, provide service delivery and resolve the multi-layered conflict. Nepal has a very weak middle class and poor mediating agencies to protect the rights and welfare of the poor. Tax contributes 12 per cent to GDP and the contribution of public sector output to GDP is only about 7 per cent. Foreign aid constitutes 70 per cent of development outlays. Domestic revenue raising capacity is very poor. Easy borrowing from international institutions has established the government's autonomy from their tax-paying citizens. As a result, the government is less concerned with institutional capacity of the state to deliver governance goals. The substantial 17 per cent contribution of remittance to GDP too has detrimental effect on the accountability of government. GDP growth rate of

2.3 per cent hardly balances out the population growth of 2.2 per cent. The daily per capita income of USD 1 puts Nepal's human security condition at the bottom of world development statistics. Above all, feudalism, caste hierarchy and patriarchy have suppressed social mobility of the underclass and thus reflected with huge inequality in the country (Dahal 2012). Murshed and Gates, on the other hand, points out that the conflicts in Nepal for so many years could be wished away, where a pure military solution also was infeasible (2003: 6). According to their opinion, the other countries which have won wars against rebels have achieved peace through poverty reduction and through redistribution of assets along with economic reforms. Thus, addressing horizontal inequalities which lies at the heart of the causes of conflicts is essential. But, in Nepal, some 40 years of development assistance have failed to reduce such acute horizontal inequalities in the country. Thus, the key areas of horizontal inequalities that need to be addressed in Nepal include landlessness, the debt burden of the rural poor and greater non-upper-caste access to state-sector jobs. In 2006, when Nepal went for a transition and after election its Constituent Assembly had selected 601 members, with CPN (Maoist) having overwhelming victory, there was a ray of hope for stability. But resentment and dissatisfaction surfaced amongst various groups. Though the Constituent Assembly allowed representation of women, ethnic and other indigenous communities, Dalits, Madhesis and also groups from remote regions, yet around 20 out of 101 ethnic groups were left out from the Constituent Assembly in which they demanded their participation. Therefore, though this new parliament had demolished the centuries-old monarchy by declaring a federal democratic republic in Nepal, it was left with many more unmet challenges. Various armed groups, due to security vacuum and lack of development, are now actively engaged in factionalism, separatist and other criminal and underground activities like extortion, killings and others. Thus, for bridging the development–security gap, economic growth, good governance and peace-building measures have become imperative for Nepal's stable democratic future. But the country is still one of the least developed countries in South Asia, where about 85 per cent of its population depend on the agriculture and rural sectors. While reviewing the economic development of Nepal, a report of *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* mentions that:

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its per capita gross domestic product is US\$ 457, the human development index value is 38.1 and purchasing power parity is dollar one a day. The human poverty index puts Nepal 84th among 108 developing countries. Nepal's population is 29 million with growth of 2.09 per cent while GDP growth rate stands at 2.3 per cent. It ranks 157th out of 177 countries in Human Development Report 2011. The Human Development Index stands at 0.534, life expectancy at birth is 60.94 years and adult literacy stands at 51.4 per cent. Agriculture provides a livelihood for three-fourths of the population and accounts 38 per cent of GDP. The World Food Programme has identified Nepal as 'hunger hotspots' as 42 out of 75 districts are food deficient, while over one-third of districts fall below the minimum food security supplies. Tax contributes only 12 per cent to GDP' (2008: 6).

Thus, such compelling sufferings and country's struggle to cope with great disparities of caste, gender and geography has made Nepal a very volatile neighbour for India, as her labour migration is becoming an increasing important source of income to counter the issues of high poverty, unemployment and internal insecurity, largely due to Maoist insurgency within the nation (Bhattraai 2007). Large, unskilled labour and very low human development have not only challenged the internal development of Nepal, but has also threatened the development discourse of the borderlands of India, which have proximity to Nepal. A look at the human development index in Table 5.1 across Nepal would show the degree of disparity that exists within the country.

As shown by the *Nepal Human Development Report*, the human development index varies widely by the rural-urban divide, by ecological belt and by developed region and sub-regions. Thus, urban dwellers have much higher human development than their rural counterparts as shown in Table 5.1. The disparity level in Nepal is so high that if Kathmandu is excluded, the value of HDI drops to 0.494 from 0.509 (UNDP 2009: 32–35). Human poverty is even more than income poverty across Nepal. As argued by Murshed and Gates, the relative deprivation of the people in the remote rural districts of the hills and mountains of Nepal is very high due to the lack of development in those areas, which has fuelled the Maoist insurgency over

time (2005: 121–34). Such struggle has its root in the 10 years of continuous conflicts in Nepal where a large number of people died, while countless others were raped, dispossessed, displaced, and traumatised. But still the underlying causes of such conflicts have neither been resolved nor been addressed. Poverty, marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of caste and ethnicity still continue. Thus, grievances associated with the war persist and have been increased by internally displaced persons, frustrated combatants and a population suspended between cynicism and hope (*Nepal Human Development Report* 2009: 84). As further reported by *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, security, peace and development are marred by a severe lack of coherent vision and conflicting orientation. Thus, around 33 armed groups are engaged in various activities, ranging from separatism and extortion, to killing. The concentration of mainstream leaders in Kathmandu has also caused such security issues especially in Terai and eastern Hills, where there is the advantage of a sanctuary in the tribal areas across India (*Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* 2008: 5). The Terai problems and their demands for Madhes Autonomous Region need to be resolved urgently, otherwise such volatilities and Terai's proximity to the Indian land through open border and affiliation of co-ethnics across the border would deteriorate the security scenario of bordering Indian states, which already were highly sensitive over a period of time. As reported by *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, though the flurry of diplomatic activities within Nepal demonstrates its geopolitical importance, but this has also posed a security dilemma to both her neighbours India and China (ibid.: 4). For India, the threat remains much deeper due to cross-border ethnic relations and due to the free movement of people in both the lands.

Table 5.1 Change in Nepal's HDI

<i>Region</i>	<i>HDI in 2001</i>		<i>HDI in 2006</i>		<i>Change in HD.</i>
Nepal	0.471		0.509		0.038
	(39.6)		(35.4)		
Urban/Rural Residence					
Urban	0.581	1	0.630	1	0.049
	(25.2)		(20.7)		
Rural	0.452	2	0.482	2	0.030
	(42.0)		(38.2)		
Ecological Region					
Mountain	0.386	3	0.436	3	0.050
	(49.8)		(43.3)		
Hill	0.512	1	0.543	2	0.031
	(38.8)		(32.7)		
Terai	0.478	2	0.494	1	0.016
	(39.6)		(36.9)		
Development Region					
Eastern Region	0.493	1	0.526	2	0.033
	(37.1)		(33.7)		
Central Region	0.490	3	0.531	1	0.041
	(39.7)		(35.3)		
Western Region	0.491	2	0.513	3	0.025
	(36.7)		(33.2)		
Mid-Western Region	0.402	5	0.452	5	0.050
	(46.3)		(38.7)		
Far-Western Region	0.404	4	0.461	4	0.057
	(45.9)		(39.0)		

Source: UNDP (2009).

Note: Figures in the parentheses are human poverty index.

NEPALIS IN EAST AND NORTHEAST INDIA

Revisiting the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950

It can now be understood that the present internal turmoil of Nepal has the potential to destabilise India's borderland to a large extent with various security threats. And in this context the 1950 treaty, which was perceived to maintain a friendly and peaceful relation with Nepal with an emphasis on the reciprocal movement of people, needs to be revisited and analysed deeply. Whether such a well-thought treaty of peace and friendship can serve the purpose of mutual understanding at least in the borderlands, or it needs to be regulated on the basis of challenges that are confronted with.

As Nepal is plagued with economic underdevelopment and political instability, it is therefore most expected that cross-border illegal activities with India will increase. With an open border, such activities can be almost uncontrollable. Even in the past, according to Kansakar, such free and unrestricted movement of people of Nepal and India across the border was never possible to control and regulate. The major thoroughfare across this unique border existed for social relations, cultural exchanges (pilgrimages, festivities, fairs, etc.), trade and commerce and they constituted the major road junctions and places for levying customs duties. People of both the countries could cross the border from any point, despite the existence of border checkpoints at several locations. There are 22 such checkpoints, which are meant for carrying out bilateral trade. However, only at six transit points out of them, the movement was permitted to nationals of third countries, who require entry and exit visas to cross the border. At the whole length of border except the areas where police patrol and the checkpoints exist and where para-military or military forces of either country are vigilant, illegal movement of goods and people has remained a common and accepted feature on both sides of India-Nepal border (Kansakar 2001: 1 2). But with changing scenario in Nepal, such open border routes can be most dangerous sources of conflicts and security issue for India's borderlands. The open border, which served as the route to promote development, can now turn to be a route for various cross-border illegal operations, activities and

infiltration which can cause fresh security implications in India's vulnerable Northeast.

The Indo-Nepal friendship treaty of 1950 has agreed to continue the free movement of people of one nation in the territory of the other, enjoying the privileges of property ownership, participation in trade and commerce and movement of people across the border. Such a treaty has encouraged various marketplaces and small towns to develop along the Indo-Nepal border since early 20th century. Many of these towns across the Terai areas have emerged as the trade routes for both India and Nepal and transit points for access to sea from Calcutta port. Thus, the open border, according to Upreti, has provided additionally a large number of economic opportunities and facilities to the people of either side. Due to various development works like urbanisation and industrialisation along with the growing economy of India, both skilled and unskilled labours are in demand, and thus large number of people from Nepal crosses the border everyday to work on Indian side. The transport network on Indian side is quite developed in the bordering Indian towns, which provide additional opportunities to the Nepali people. Even during harvesting session, this cross-border inflow of people goes high. The bordering Indian markets are used by the Nepali people for transaction like petrol, kerosene, edible items, cloth, medicines, and various other goods. Though such cross-border economic interaction has provided livelihood to many people across the border, it has also created a parallel economy in this bordering region. Cutting across the activities in market, agriculture or *mandis*, the violation of work rule has given rise to such parallel economy. But such economic linkage has survived since it served the interest of the local people (Upreti 2009: 126).

Such thriving local economies across the borders of India and Nepal have remained unsuccessful to restrict the large inflow of people. So the colonial pattern of Nepali migration to India's East and Northeast for both Gorkha recruitment and for the purpose of labour in the forestlands, in tea plantations, grazing land, and in the growing business of milk supply continued even in the post-colonial period. Rather the Indo-Nepal friendship treaty has made Nepali migration to the East and Northeast to increase overwhelmingly. Nepalis migrated and have lived and assimilated well among the locals and indigenous people (Nath 2005: 57–72). Thus, according to Pattanaik, the historical ties between the countries, which

explains the necessity of the Peace and Friendship treaty, could provide an impetus to their historical socio-cultural assimilation (Pattanaik 2000). Thus, geographical contiguity, socio-cultural affinity, the kinship factor, and historical reasons have left the Indo-Nepal open borders perpetually vulnerable to migration and later was strengthened with the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship treaty, allowing Nepalis to freely reside, own property, find employment and carry on business in India. Article VI of the 1950 treaty states:

Each Government undertakes, in token of the neighbourly friendship between India and Nepal, to give to the nationals of the other, in its territory, national treatment with regard to participation in industrial and economic development of such territory and to the grant of concessions and contracts relating to such development.

Article VII further adds:

The Governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.

Therefore, the treaty of 1950 and its provisions provide the opportunity for not treating Nepali immigrants as illegal (Behera 2011). This makes the whole dynamics of Nepali migration to India as different from that of other nationality like Bengali migration from Bangladesh. The socio-cultural continuity between the two countries makes the Nepali entity very much a part of the Indian ethos and psyche. According to L. K. Baral, India–Nepal migration is a social inter-relationship hardly affected by other factors. Since peoples on both sides of the border share a common language, religion and ethnic identity, their relations transcend political considerations, therefore such migration was not seen as a threat for a long time (2000: 71).

Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

So, though, historically both nations shared the socio-cultural space, and cross-border inflow of people had remained a very common and acceptable phenomenon for a long time, over the years the pressure of such inflow of population has started reflecting in the changing demographic and economic landscapes of East and Northeast India. With such visible changes, an anti-Nepali feeling and conflicts started surfacing, giving rise to the problems of internal security in this region. But such an anti-Nepali feeling has not restricted the immigration, rather Nepal's internal volatile scenario has further aggravated such trend of immigration. In recent years, as the internal armed conflict aggravated in Nepal due to Maoists insurgency, ethnic rivalry and economic disparity, the problems of internal displacement as well as out-migration from Nepal to India also has intensified. A record brings out that only in the year 2004, about 200 Nepalis have been crossing the border every hour (*The Case for Intervention in Nepal* 2005). David Seddon has raised the issue of 'forced migration' from rural areas to the towns of Nepal and also to the neighbouring and other nations, which has gone high in recent decades due to Maoist insurgency, which surfaced in 1996, when the CPN (Maoist) launched a 'People's War' to overthrow the monarchy as well as the government with the aim to establish a Maoist People's democracy. Also a failure to create and implement a coherent all round development strategy by mobilising all Nepal's resources, including an effective education, training and manpower planning for human resource development has actually made the economic opportunities very low in the country with large number of semi and unskilled labourers. Thus, migration becomes inevitable for such groups of people (Seddon 2005: 2).

Nepal's internal political instability, economic underdevelopment, poverty, high unemployment scenario, and ethnic conflicts have heavily led to the increase in out-migration to the neighbouring nations like India, and India's Eastern and Northeastern states have remained open to such immigration. The factors motivating such migration to India are clearly explained by Pranati Datta with the mechanical metaphors of centrifugal and centripetal forces. It appears that economic opportunities in terms of job availability in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of India worked as

centripetal force for the Nepalese. On the other side, the centrifugal force arises out of economic underdevelopment in Nepal; which forces Nepali migration to India. Nepal being primarily an agricultural economy occupies about 90 per cent of labour force and contributes nearly 68 per cent to its gross domestic product. Due to high density of population and its growth, it creates a continued pressure on land and this feature works as the major push factor for Nepalis to out-migrate to the neighbouring nation India for better opportunities (Datta 2002: 7). Thus, the prime feature of underdevelopment of Nepal's economy has been working as the centrifugal force, and has been pushing the people to come out of their land, and searching for an economically better destination like India. Thus, India's East and Northeast have become favoured destinations for them due to an easy border access. Apart from agricultural labourers, the other semi- and unskilled labourers are also leaving the country in search of a livelihood in India. So according to Datta, most of the Nepalese not being skilled enough in many of economic and trading activities, are mostly absorbed in the rural areas in the primary sector. But due to the diminishing scope of employment in this sector within Nepal, a substantial number of Nepalese tend to migrate even temporarily and seasonally to India in search of job and opportunities to supplement their family income (Datta 2002). Thus, remittances from India by and large remain highest amongst the Nepali migrant workers. As pointed out by Bhattraï, most of this remittance is earned by unskilled and also by the skilled seasonal Nepali labourers, those who are in military services, commercial sex workers and are the child labourer (Bhattraï 2007). A research by the Nepal Institute for Development Studies in 1997, which attempted a systematic look at Nepali foreign labour migration, showed that as many as 7,50,000 Nepali men and women have been working in India's private sector during that year. Most of them were engaged in manual labour jobs in industry, construction work, agriculture, or the service sector. Their wages tended to be low and the work was often dirty, dangerous, and even degrading. For example, some 100,000 to 150,000 Nepali women were estimated to be employed in the sex industry across India (The Nepal Institute for Development Studies 2003). As pointed out by David Seddon, J. Adhikari and G. Gurung, although their average earnings have remained low, and individual remittances were relatively small, but the aggregate value of money sent back to Nepal from India has been substantial, ranging

approximately between 25 and 30 billion Nepalese rupees (NRs), or about USD 450–500 million, in the mid-1990s (Seddon 2005). A report also mentions that every year nearly 10,000 children from Nepal (mostly girl children) are trafficked into India through open border. Most of them become engaged in brothels or become domestic labourers, and some of them get involved in circuses as performers. Most of them are Tamags and Dalits from districts of south and Southeast Nepal. This is to escape poverty in Nepal, and they are promised to be given a better life with education (Parashar 2011). Such a scenario is a serious issue of concern for both Nepal and India.

In India's Eastern and Northeastern region, one can see an insurmountable problem due to such inflow of people and systematic capturing of many economic activities. Thus, Parashar is of the opinion that in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, the Nepali immigrants enter and mix well with the local population, and also many a times interfere into the local political system there. But primarily the development of tea estates in Northeast India, mainly in Darjeeling and Assam has systematically increased the demand for labour. Therefore, the Nepali workers, both men and women, who come in substantial numbers begin to absorb themselves in such sector. For example, Darjeeling has historically remained one area of East India, where the Nepali migrants flocked in large numbers. They not only worked in tea estates, but also participated in a variety of other jobs in this major hill station. Thus, the Sherpa community, who are known as the mountain people from the Solu Khumbu area of Nepal and are skilled in mountaineering, have been increasingly employed as porters for the climbing expeditions that approached the Himalayas via Tibet (Parashar 2011: 3–4). The other type of migration from Nepal that has taken place systematically since the British period is of a semi-permanent category. They were, as mentioned earlier, being recruited in the Indian army as the Gorkha regiment. Due to such various historical phenomena, Nepalis were never perceived as 'alien' and were a trusted community in the Indian soil. Their contribution was recognised duly and they have become just like other Indian nationals within the broad framework of the Indian federation. Indian Nepalis, on the other hand, have evolved their own institutions, socio-cultural practices and sincerely have contributed substantively to the making of modern India. Thus, 'Gorkha' is an honorific word from British days to denote all martial

ances of Nepal and is treated as an important element in the country's security system. In fact in post-Independence period, India made separate arrangements to continue with the Army's Gorkha recruitment. At present, there are approximately 30,000 Gorkhas in the Indian Army and over 100,000 Gorkha pensioners, who are Indian for all practical purposes. Gorkha bravery has been identified with Indian heroism for both domestic and overseas consumption. Currently, Gorkhas are settled around the old Gorkha regimental centres, such as Dharamshala, Bakloh in Himachal Pradesh, Dehradun, Darjeeling, Shillong, Assam, and many other Northeastern towns. Significant numbers of Nepali men were employed in the Indian Army in the 1950s and 1960s, and recruitment to the Indian police and other services, including the civil service, augmented the total of those employed in the public sector in India. Towards the end of the 1990s, some 2,50,000 Nepalis were employed in India's public sector, of whom perhaps 50,000 were in the army (Seddon 2005). Another estimate says that out of an estimated 23 million population of Nepal, more than 9 million Nepalese reside in India. The Indian Army has approximately 35,000 Gorkha personnel serving in 38 Gorkha battalions and one artillery unit. There are also many Gorkha personnel serving in the para-military forces of India (Singh 2010).

While looking at the demographic strength of such immigrant community, it is actually not possible to estimate the exact number, but the fact is that the Nepali immigrants like Bangladeshis have sizeable presences in India today with heavy concentration in the Northeastern states, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. According to Behera,

Unlike migration elsewhere, say to Europe or the United States, ethnic commonalities of Indians with Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants imbue migration with an ethnic dimension, both as concerns 'push' and 'pull' factors. Not surprisingly, the same ethnic dimension impinges on the migrant's choice of whether to co-opt an Indian identity or retain that of their country of origin; as also on associated issues, such as, social linkages, security, foreign policy and economic development of the adopted homeland (Behera 2011).

Along such ethnic affinities, Bhattraï further adds that, India always has remained one of the favoured destinations for the Nepali immigration for many reasons since the time of colonial administration. And in the recent times, such migration takes place primarily because of its proximity and open border notion, cultural affinities between the nations, easily convertible currency, easy and affordable travelling options and histories of migrations in family and village (2007). Thus, the major push and pull factors of such migration trend can broadly be categorised as follows:

- (a) Ethnic and linguistic similarities across the border of south plains and the hills in the east and west of India and Nepal have promoted matrimonial relationships and cross-country migration.
- (b) Cultural and religious links through both Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimages and visits of Indian tourists to see the abode of Pasupatinath and the international heritage site of Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha, have strengthened the bond of friendship and mutual understanding and cultural relations.
- (c) Due to better health infrastructure, a large number of Nepali citizens from Terai region come to India to avail the facilities.
- (d) Those engaged in agricultural activities in the border region of both the nations are benefited from sale and purchase of primary products across the border regions of both sides. The growing urbanisation and towns have improved the employment opportunities in this region (ibid.: 11).

Given such ethnic and cultural similarities between India and Nepal, Behera points out that, the ‘ethnic–cultural space’ of each nation intrudes into the ‘geographical–territorial space’ of the other. It is natural that the ethno-cultural contiguity and continuity give opportunities to the immigrants to India to relate to their respective country of ‘origin’. Thus, in the case of Nepal, social and ethnic interrelationship is the major factor in migration. From the more ethnically sensitive areas of Eastern Nepal like Ilam, Panchthar and Jhapa bordering Darjeeling and Sikkim, people have been moving back and forth with ease for marriage, family occasions, work, and even education (Behera 2011). Therefore though Nepalis have also been migrating to other nations as well, but India has remained a major

destination. In the 1991 census of Nepal, it has been recorded that 89.2 per cent of Nepalis have migrated to India compared to 45 per cent immigration in 1941, out of which four-fifth have remained in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, and West Bengal (Bhattraï 2007). The 1991 census recorded 4,33,000 Nepali speakers in the state of Assam. Sibadas Nandi, on the other hand, affirms that the Nepali migrants in many areas of North Bengal within the state of West Bengal have already outnumbered the local population leading to ethnic tensions and sometimes violence (2009: 3). Statistics about the number of Nepalis in India are assumptive as there is no documentation of Nepali migrants. At present, it is believed that, there are approximately 10–12 million Nepalis living in India, which include both migrant Nepalis and Nepali-speaking Indian citizens. The latter, also known as Indian Nepalis or Indian Gorkhas, constitute a significant proportion of the population in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, and other Northeastern states, as well as Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. According to the Refugee Review Tribunal (2006), there are anywhere between 0.6 and 12 million Nepalis currently residing in India. The counts given by different organisations and individual scholars fall within this range. Highlighting the figures of Census of India, 2001, Upreti mentions that the total number of migrants from Nepal stood at 596,696. Ranjit Devraj put the figure at more than 10 million (cited in Behera 2011). Further, it is difficult to distinguish between different categories of migrants as Nepali migration to India has been on a permanent, temporary or seasonal basis (Upreti 2009: 46). The 1991 census of Nepal recorded that the absentee population from Nepal which migrated to India constituted 89.2 per cent of total migrants, while according to the 2001 census of India, 68 per cent of the total population from Nepal during the period 1991–2001 immigrated to India (Bhattraï 2011). As pointed out vigorously by Nandi, only a cursory look at the maps of North Bengal, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim clearly draws a pattern and direction of migration. In Sikkim, for instance, massive migration of Nepali nationals had swamped the autochthons even prior to its merger with India. Nepali nationals then voted for merging with India and then demanded citizenship. Thus, the Government of India had to accept 80,000 such citizens, and thus Sikkim was ‘conquered’ (Nandi 2009). Similarly, the Darjeeling district of West Bengal also has remained another place and the passage for the Nepali migrants to come and spill-over to the

adjoining parts of North Bengal and other parts of Northeast India through the Siliguri corridor, which is commonly known as the ‘Chicken Neck’. If one looks at the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, the census figures of India show that the Nepali population growth has increased during the decade of 1991 to 2001, though the total population growth in both West Bengal as well as in Darjeeling has gone down (see Table 5.2). As Kar has shown, according to 1991 Nepali census, the number of migrants from Nepal during 1981 to 1991 has been 658,337, of which 89.2 per cent, that is 587,236 persons have crossed Indian border. Again during 1991 to 2001, the number of migrants from Nepal had been 762,181, of which nearly 68 per cent of them, that is, around 518,283 persons have crossed Indian border (Kar 2009: 35).

Table 5.2 Decadal Growth Rate of Nepali Population in India (%)

<i>Decades</i>	<i>Population Growth in India</i>	<i>Nepali Population Growth in India</i>	<i>Population Growth in West Bengal</i>	<i>Nepali Population Growth in Darjeeling District</i>	<i>Nepali Population Growth in Darjeeling District</i>
1971-81	25	-4	23	31	21
1981-91	24	53	25	27	18
1991-2001	22	38	18	24	22

Source: Estimated from various census reports in India.

The author has further explained that between the period of 1951 to 1961, the inflow of famished population from hills of Nepal on the slope of Darjeeling almost instantaneously elevated the density of population to a suffocating level. The inflow of Nepali migrants as tea garden labourers and sustenance seekers continued and by the year 1981 the density of population in the hilly region of Darjeeling became 228 per sq. km, whereas the figures in Himachal Pradesh in the same year was 77 per sq. km and 95 per sq. km in the hills of Uttar Pradesh in the western Himalayas, 60 per sq. km in

Meghalaya, 47 per sq. km in Nagaland, 23 per sq. km in Mizoram, and 8 per sq. km in Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, all these hilly regions of north and northeast India were far behind Darjeeling hills in terms of population density. It's no wonder then that such inundating pressure of the unnatural growth of population has been caused by the continued migration from Nepal to the hills of North Bengal has brought both economic and ecological pressure to the region (Kar 2009: 39). Thus, one can see that both West Bengal and Sikkim are the two major Eastern and Northeastern states where Nepali population is still infiltrating en masse and then spreading across other parts of this region. They are getting absorbed in various economic activities and then slowly penetrating and creating pressure in the political and socio-economic spaces of this region.

While narrating the scenario in Assam vis-à-vis the other Northeastern parts, Sanjib Baruah mentions that Nepali migration to the Northeast and to the foothills of southern Bhutan became almost a part of the next wave of migration in the first two decades of the 20th century. Their affinity with the people of the Brahmaputra Valley and their occupational versatility made them easily acceptable to the local communities. Nepalis were even allowed to settle in some restricted areas of Northeast India except the NEFA, where even the Assamese were also excluded. But in the lower hill areas they were visible (Baruah 1999: 63). Therefore, Rose reported that dating back to the 1960s, during his travels in this region, he found that in the area which is now Meghalaya, every village below 4,000 ft is Nepali-inhabited with Nepali-speaking villages, with little evidence of tribal authority, in the supposedly the tribal areas. Thus, during Independence, the Nepali community was the quietly dominant element in the lower hill areas of Assam except NEFA and Tripura, and this continued to be the case even in the post-Independence period (Baruah 2004). Baruah argues that Nepali origin people have been living in Assam for a very long time period. Even those Nepalis who have come recently have almost all legal rights in India. This is because the treaty of 1950 allows an unrestricted travel of citizens between the two countries along with right to engage in economic occupations, to settle and to own a property till date (Baruah 1999: 62). Baruah further points out that this Nepali community to a large extent has attempted to assimilate with the local people and across area through various economic activities like cattle-grazing and milk business. Apart from

economic participation, the assimilation of Nepali population in Northeast India is reflected in many other spaces like their participation in freedom struggle of India as well as in local literature, especially in Assamese literature. Alongside such assimilation, the other paradox of considering Nepalis as an 'immigrant community' in Assam is that until 1980, Nepali cattle grazers were among the protected groups, along with the scheduled tribes in the areas known as tribal blocks (Baruah 1999: 62). The Nepalis eventually started settling in many urban centres with better education and respectable jobs. But despite their contribution to the local economy, polity and society, they remained a submerged identity. But their increasing population gradually led to a pressure on resources and employments and soon these migrant communities were targeted and a demand rose to send them back to the countries of origin. Thus, Nepalis living in Assam for generations in peace and by maintaining a submerged identity got caught in the crossfire with anti-foreigner agitation (Nath 2003: 214). Nath argues that:

Almost all states of Northeast India have, at some time or the other, experienced political mobilization and organized violence against migrants, anti-outsider movements leading to victimization and expulsion of the communities of migrant origin and at times even ethnic cleansing of the non-indigenous groups. This 'identity politics', which became the defining theme of the post colonial Northeast Indian political agenda, led an exclusive claim to a land that had emerged as a shared homeland since the earliest times. The anti-outsider politics came sharply into focus by the 'son of the soil' agitation in Assam, which became a point of reference for many of the subsequent nativist movements in the rest of the Northeastern region (2005: 60).

Thus, Nepalis in Northeast India have started becoming a serious case of conflict-afflicted population. In Assam a large scale migration of this community has made a section of the Asamiya apprehensive as to the alleged threat to their identity, and thus making them vulnerable to various kinds of violence, conflicts and displacement, despite the fact that such immigrant community has contributed towards social, economic and political development of Assam. According to Nath, during the 'nativist' agitation —

the Assam Movement of the 1970s to 1980s — the Nepalis were victimised with Bangladeshi migrants, and were labeled as illegal foreigners or infiltrator by deliberately ignoring the Indo-Nepal friendship treaty of 1950 (Nath 2003: 208). Such anti-Nepali feeling has started momentum and then aggravated in Northeast India in the aftermath of Assam movement. Monirul Hussain points out that ‘irrespective of their length of stay in Assam, Nepalis virtually became dangerous unwanted foreigners, who were threatening to the socio-cultural and political identity of the Asamiyas in their traditional homeland’ (1993: 260). Thus, the Assam movement radically transformed the existing relations between Nepalis and Asamiya in Assam. Nepalis have become dangerous and unwanted foreigners in the state and there was a demand that Nepalis should be removed from electoral rolls (Nath 2003: 216). This became the referent point for similar ethno-sensitive tribes of other Northeastern states to fight against Nepali immigration. Thus, in other parts of Northeast India, like Meghalaya, having ethnic violence as a predominant factor, has often targeted, killed and evicted a large number of Nepali population. Settled in almost all the states in Northeast India, they have been frequently identified as the foreigners, primarily because their growing numbers have caused worry in this backward region of India. They have mercilessly suffered largescale evictions and internal displacement when various anti-foreigner agitations are in full force in the region. Also, on the other hand, with the rising ethnic conflicts across the states in Northeast India, Nepalis along with Bengalis (both Hindu and Muslim) have been victimised as the ethnic ‘other’ and have experienced discrimination and persecution. The ‘son of the soil’ agitation in Assam during 1979–85 has deported many Nepalis to their respective country of origin. However, Nepalis, who became internally displaced and spilled over to all the Northeastern states have failed to draw much attention so far, as their number was not significant and also due to their mobile nature. It is possibly necessary to make a systematic study of this issue of Nepali eviction and displacement in this region of Northeast India, which took place despite the Peace and Friendship treaty. As pointed out in a report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, which conducted a study on the nature and trend of internal displacement in Northeast India due to ethnic conflicts (with no mention of displacement of the Nepali community), a lack of a systematic response to violence-induced displacement by the government

authorities in Northeast India and their failure to monitor various such situations is due to an absence of a national policy or legislation covering such situation (2011: 25). Such a situation, therefore, demands a deep study and review of 1950 treaty, which can help to evolve a durable policy frame for future discourse.

Impact on Security

Thus, one can mention that even if Nepali migrants have provoked several conflicts and violence in Northeast India at various levels, yet there have been no political or security fallouts anywhere where Indian Nepalis are located, even beyond Northeast like West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. The security implications of Nepali migration to India have so far not been seriously assessed nor have they been made an important part of the country's security discourse, unlike Bangladeshi Muslim migration and the rise of Muslim fundamentalism. Rather Nepali migration is yet to be studied carefully and securitised. The various reasons for such a scenario, as analysed by Nath and Behera (Nath 2003: 67; Behera 2011), are as follows:

First, is their attempt at and process of assimilation into mainstream and local population. A Nepali in Assam or in India has a number of meaningful identities — he is a citizen and a soldier of the Indian Armed Forces, he is identified as a Hindu like Chettri or Gurung, which is important in India's caste identity factor, and he is one of the sub-nationalities in the Indian cultural commonwealth.

Second, the Indian Nepali population has so far become a major deterrent and a check on anti-Indian activities of migrant Nepalis because of the wariness with which Indian Nepalis view the possibility of being implicated in such activities. This is why, even at the height of the Maoist movement, migrant Nepalis could not indulge in anti-Indian activities openly even in regions where Nepali-speaking people were in substantial numbers.

Third, Nepalis have so far not been linked and identified with any terrorist activities in India, unlike Bangladeshi migrants, who easily tend to get identified with jihadi terrorists because they are Muslims.

Fourth, since there are fewer permanent Nepali migrants to India's Northeastern and northern states, they do not provoke a backlash among Indian citizens as they are not perceived to threaten Indian resources.

Thus, the general Indian psyche has not viewed migrant Nepalis as security risks. But it is interesting to observe that despite the tendency to view Nepalis as part of the larger Indian culture and ethos, the rise of organisations like the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES), an

outfit of migrant Nepali residents in India, registered in 1979, that works for the realisation of Greater Nepal indicates that migrant Nepalis are being communalised. Thus, the organisation was banned in the year 2002, but with its large cadre base and expanding membership, the ABNES has established an extensive network in India over the years, particularly in northern Bengal, the Northeast, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, where Nepalis are concentrated in large numbers. The organisational strength of migrant Nepalis may not, therefore, be ignored on emotional and historical grounds as this could assume serious proportions and pose a security threat to India. Hence, at the government level, the pattern and nature of Nepali migration to India needs to be monitored and regulated (Behera 2011).

But apart from such migration issues, open borders started becoming security sensitive with other activities like trafficking, smuggling, insurgency, and various other non-traditional threats, as has been the case in the Indo-Bangla porous border. Thus, the whole border has gradually been sensitized to the security issue, which in turn started affecting the age-old natural economic and development activities of the region. Consequently, border management and vigilance of this region has become important and an integral component of India's internal security management. The 1,751 km India–Nepal border runs through 20 districts of five Indian states. Most of the border areas, as reported by the *South Asia Monitor*, run through underdeveloped and populous areas where high crime rates, poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, and an ill-equipped police force make conditions conducive for various forces inimical to Indian and Nepalese interests to operate. Moreover, there is a high volume of illicit trade with forest products and wildlife. The open border and absence of effective law and enforcement in Nepal have also contributed to the act like drug smuggling. A number of recent reports have indicated that Nepal's Maoist insurgents are involved in smuggling drugs to India to raise money to buy arms (*South Asia Monitor* 2006). There are indications that India is now concerned about the impact of Maoist insurgency in Nepal. The insurgency in Nepal has spilled over to Uttarakhand state in India. There also appears to be a nexus between the Maoist in Nepal with similar outfits as People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha. The annual report of the Indian Ministry of Defence for the year 2002–3 stated that 'the growing influence and grip of the Maoists throughout the country,

particularly the Terai areas bordering India and their links with Indian left extremist outfits are a cause of serious concern'. The growing influence of such outfits have the potential to easily sensitise India's Northeast through the 'Chicken Neck' corridor. The corridor connects the Northeast and the rest of India through West Bengal, with Nepal and Bangladesh lying on either side and Bhutan on the northern side of the corridor. Being a sensitive corridor, if insurgency in the Jhapa district of Nepal's Eastern Development Region bordering India's West Bengal were to spread through this Chicken's Neck, India's control of the entire Northeast might be endangered. It may be remembered that India is already fighting many separatist insurgencies in such states as Nagaland and Manipur in the Northeast. A meeting of Chief Ministers of the states affected by Maoist movements similar to Nepal was organised in September 2004 in Delhi. It was attended by Chief Ministers and senior officials of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra. The meeting expressed concern about linkages between Maoists in Nepal and similar outfits in India and emphasised better co-ordination between security and intelligence agencies. A peaceful resolution of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal is also in India's strategic interests. It was precisely because of the open Indo-Nepal border that the Maoist insurgency could spread so fast as the insurgents could often take shelter across the border. Many of the security concerns of the Indians could have been addressed had the border been better regulated by such means, as record keeping of movements and residents in areas close to the border provided identity cards that could be used while crossing the border. India has so far been reluctant to regulate the open Indo-Nepal border but there are indications that it is now changing (Raj 2006). The Nepali Maoists connection with migrant Nepalis in India stems from the support of a section of people of Nepali origin through outfits like ABNES. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has a direct impact on Indian states, bordering Nepal and then spilling over to other vulnerable states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, and parts of Uttar Pradesh. Nepal is providing support to the Maoists by way of safe havens, weapons and financial assistance, the way the other neighbouring nations did for Northeast insurgent groups. More than 150 districts in 13 states of India are affected by left-extremist violence. These groups have seriously undermined the writ of the government, as they

collect taxes, dispense justice and decide on contracts. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has compelled India to deploy the 'Shashtra Seema Bal' (renamed Special Services Bureau) and the Border Security Force (BSF) in sensitive areas along the 1,751 km long Indo-Nepal border. The increasing deployment of Indian security forces on the Indo-Nepal border is an unfortunate development, as the border between the two countries, despite problems of a common nature, has been known for its tranquility and openness, and contributed much to amity, fraternity and shared development. The Maoists in Nepal have dealt a huge blow to this special relationship, which transcends the confines of the nation-state because of the sheer strength of the historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious bonds between the people of the two countries (Singh 2010).

According to Indian officials and strategic affairs analysts, the other strategic issue could be with China's slow and gradual influence in Nepal. Thus, for example, its move to extend the rail link to its border with Nepal, which can reduce Kathmandu's dependence on India, since such connectivity will enable Nepal to import important items like petroleum products from Beijing. About Nepal's changing approach towards China, Satish Kumar points out that a pro-China Nepal would be catastrophic for the centre. A Nepal which is friendlier to China eliminates Delhi's access to Tibet, and puts pressure on Sikkim and Bhutan. A hostile Nepal places the Indian union in jeopardy. At any given time, Nepal could choke Indian access to the seven states in the Northeast, which are already up in arms against the centre. The Chinese presence in Nepal is also getting larger and is working systematically to remove the over-dependence of Nepal on India. China started giving aid to Nepal as part of its policy. The road provided a direct strategic connection between China and Nepal via the difficult Tibetan route. If Nepal was not able to resist an attack through this road, the Indian heartland would be easily accessible. For India, all these developments can be a cause of grave concern (Kumar 2011). Thus, apart from Nepal's internal perpetual instability, which has assumed increasing significance of India-Nepal border, the other factor of increasing Chinese proximity to Nepal is gradually alarming Indian internal security scenario through such open border.

Across the border towards the East and Northeast, many other anti-social elements and criminal acts are also visible. Thus various lawless activities

like theft, robbery, kidnapping, murder, looting, land grabbing take place on regular basis. Smuggling of arms and explosives through this border has become a serious problem, making management of this open border a complex problem and has become smuggler's paradise. There is no definite data about the volume of illegal trade, but it has been estimated that the value may be as high as eight to 10 times the official bilateral trade. Complete freedom of currency movement between the two countries facilitated illegal border trade. Nepal is considered safe for illicit drug trade, drugs mafia on the India–Nepal border, thus, pose another serious challenge to the Indian security apparatus, and most criminals find safe passage to Nepal and a safe refuge too. The Nepali border has been the passage to a refuge for smugglers who have been able to smuggle drugs and arms to India without hindrance. Apart from trading of *ganja* and hashish, synthetic drugs like ecstasy pills, amphetamine and methamphetamine are also smuggled (Upreti 2009: 129). But Kansakar argues that,

There is no denying the fact that it is not unusual from practical point of view to have illegal smuggling of goods, trafficking of girls to brothels in Indian cities, trafficking in narcotic drugs, arms and ammunitions and movement of criminals and terrorists. In principle, both Nepal and India have positively agreed to control such illegal activities along the border, but there is lack of an effective and practical approach (2001:9).

All these concerns at the security front demand a revisit of the treaty of 1950. Moving apart from the original idea of promoting development across the border of two nations, through unrestricted movement of people and economic interaction, such a legitimacy is providing opportunities for more illegal activities over a period of time. This is primarily because of Nepal's prolonged internal challenges and such cross-border activities will continue till the time Nepal attains peace and stability.

CHANGING POLITICAL CONTOURS THROUGH 'GORKHALAND'

While the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) provided the Nepali citizens with economic rights on Indian soil, it did not grant any voting and other political rights to them. But with persistent inflow of Nepali people to

India, which led to various ethnic conflicts, anti-Nepali agitations and the ethnic cleansing of this community, especially in Northeast India, it has gradually got them thinking about political identity on Indian soil by asserting their rights and demands. Also, back in 1944, as pointed out by Nath, at the regional level the Assam Provincial Gorkha League (APGL) was formed in Shillong at the initiative of the All India Gorkha League (1943). In 1947, at a conference held at Guwahati, they demanded a minority status for the Nepalis in Assam. It was renamed as Assam Gorkha Sammelan in 1966. Along with this various other organisations like All Assam Nepali Students Union, Nepali Jatiya Parishad and Nepali Suraksha Parishad were formed to assert their demands (Kansakar 2001: 216). The Darjeeling district of West Bengal is the other area where Nepalis have been strongly attempting to form a political space through the Gorkhaland movement. This movement is an expression of their legitimate political rights in this land.

The demand revolves around the creation of a separate Gorkhaland from West Bengal to give political and economic rights to the locals, keeping in mind the strategic location of the area. Thus, according to Sinha, Nepali-speaking Indians have gradually become assertive not only in terms of asserting their ethnic identity but also in political terms. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) of Subhash Ghising, concentrated in Darjeeling hill areas, demanded in the 1980s a separate Gorkha homeland within the Indian Union. Ghising, making a distinction between the Nepalis of Nepal and Indian Nepalis, insisted that the latter are Gorkhas, their language is Gorkhali and their homeland should be Gorkhaland. He also wanted to replace the word 'Nepali' with 'Gorkha', in order to distinguish between the Indian Nepalis from the people of Nepal. However, Ghising's logic had few takers. Ultimately, Ghising's demand for a separate homeland for the Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas was accommodated with the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in West Bengal. The demand for statehood by Indian Nepalis got strong support from the Nepalis of the Northeast, mainly because they see such a state as a possible sanctuary in the eventuality of their being evicted from their settlements (Sinha and Subba 2003: 373). The general Gorkha sentiment in this region reflects that the Gorkhas are under the domination of West Bengal for a long time, despite the fact that they have a distinct culture, language, identity, and thriving economy of tea, timber and tourism, and thus the demand for a separate land

is justifiable. As explained by Kar, the leaders of the All India Gorkha League have shifted their central office from Dehradun to Darjeeling back in the year 1952 for achieving political gains through the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two nations. Identity politics then had begun through various demands and protests. For instance, in 1961, a language rally was organised by the All India Gorkha League in Darjeeling. A huge number of Nepalis were gathered with the demand in support of official recognition of Nepali language in India. Then a full scale agitations, campaigns and related activities started since the 1970s. Simultaneously, a mass intrusion of the Nepali nationals as labourers in the tea gardens and in the rural areas gradually also changed the entire demographic landscape of this region. In 1983, Subhas Ghising finally emerged as the leader of GNLF in Darjeeling and started fresh agitations and demands for a separate geopolitical contour. During the period 1986–88, this outfit created continued violence in the name of Gorkhaland, which still persists in the region under a different leadership of Bimal Gurung, who is the leader of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). He proclaims that ‘for the sake of identity for all the Gorkhas all over the world we want Gorkhaland’ (Sinha and Subba 2003: 44–67)

Although Ghising’s demand was within the Indian union without any secessionist undertones, it still could have some security implications for India, especially to its East and Northeast. Darjeeling is the gateway to the entire Northeast region and is an important part of the ‘Chicken’s Neck’. This district also has common borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and even the Sino-Indian border is not very far. Any protracted disturbance in this area could lead to serious dislocation of communication and transport facilities between the North-Eastern region and the rest of India. It could make the entire region more volatile and vulnerable to all sorts of disturbances (Behera 2011). Similarly, Darjeeling’s proximity to the ethnically sensitive areas of eastern Nepal might provide fertile ground for Nepali ethnicity to grow, giving rise to separatist tendencies. During the GNLF movement, Ghising linked the proposed Gorkhaland with Nepali territories, west of the Teesta River (Boral 2000: 73). This became a burning issue in the Darjeeling hills and the Terai and Dooars of West Bengal, which plagued the economy of the region to a large extent. Such ramifications of a demand for political identity through the Gorkhaland movement in

Darjeeling has spilled over and indirectly intensified the fear and anti-Nepali agitations in Northeastern states. This, as Nath points out, has created the 'myth' of a Greater Nepal in the region and movement against such 'outsiders' received stimulus in the whole region. Thus, the Nepali community is largely caught in the crossfire and minority assertions for land and resources, at least in Assam and other parts of the Northeast, which forced them to suffer from the twin issues of foreigners and displacement. This has provoked them to fight for Nepali identity under various such organisations. They have demand for legal and constitutional protection to be recognised as 'Special Protected Class' with equal rights at par with the other protected indigenous people of the state (Nath 2005: 66).

Such problems, therefore, need to be resolved through a proper political dialogue and in a democratic ambience but not with any political game. However, the central government, in 2005, provided the Sixth Schedule status to the GNLFF-led Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), ensuring greater autonomy to the governing body. In the recent past, in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has made an attempt for a solution to this long-standing Gorkhaland issue by signing a tripartite agreement involving the Central Government, the West Bengal government and the GJM on 18 July 2011, whereby the existing DGHC would be replaced by a more politically powerful and autonomous Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. This could find a way to resolve the prolonged internal conflicts in that region. Along with such a roadmap to the political aspirations of the Nepali community in India, various existing cross-border issues and challenges, with migration at the top in the bordering regions of East and Northeast India, also need to be taken care of with deep political diplomacy with Nepal while revisiting the 1950 treaty. Various illegal activities that have been taking place have largely affected the security scenario and aggravated internal conflicts, especially in India's Northeast. At present, the existing controversial treaties, border disputes and encroachment issues are already major irritants in India–Nepal relations, and India needs to come out with a clear policy on these issues and express positive views to resolve them by enhancing co-operation with Nepal. Last, but not the least, the internal political stability in Nepal, especially in its Terai region, is extremely important for Northeast India to restrict cross-border activities and then turn the border zone economically more vibrant, as it is slowly taking place with

the other neighbours of the Northeast, such as Bangladesh and Myanmar. But, unfortunately, the political transition in Nepal along with its rising regional aspirations has become highly turbulent. To resolve such regional turbulence, a system of federal democracy — by creating autonomous provinces through its constituent Assembly — is important. This can give a voice to the aspiration of long-term peace and stability in the country. It is also important for India and its East and Northeast regions to resolve the contemporary issues with Nepal and its Terai region.

6

‘Peaceful Bhutan’ and Northeast India’s

Hope

BHUTAN: SOUTH ASIA’S PARADISE

Bhutan, the small, beautiful and peaceful mountainous nation, is an oasis in South Asia.

This is the only South Asian nation in the contemporary period, which is not primarily identified with the

problems of security and internal conflicts. Apart from religio-political dynamics, Bhutan’s attempts and

emphases towards maintaining internal peace is reflected largely with her bold and non-conventional approach to measure the country’s well-being with a concept like Gross National Happiness (GNH). Therefore, unlike the rest of the world, Bhutan has gone a step further from conventional and non-inclusive measures of economy like Gross National Income (GNI), as propounded by the Western theorists to a more comprehensive and normative approach to assess the happiness of its citizens. Such a concept was coined by one of Bhutan’s most visionary leaders, His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck back in the 1970s with an idea to evolve a sustainable development having a holistic approach towards the notion of progress and to provide equal importance to

non-economic aspects of well-being of a nation and its people. Thus, this concept incorporates four pillars like good governance, sustainable socio-

economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation.

These four pillars are further classified into nine domain areas in order to create widespread understanding of the concept and also to reflect the holistic range of GNH values which include psychological well-being, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards. The domain areas represent each of the components of well-being of the

Bhutanese people, and the term 'well-being' here refers to fulfilling conditions of a 'good life' as per the

values and principles laid down by the concept of GNH, which is now a composite measurable index (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2012). This reflects the state's priority in peace, where issues like security and conflicts that predominate the other parts of South Asia are not the major areas of challenges in this country. Thus, Bhutan has made its position unique in South Asian context, which is persistently fighting against the challenges of conflicts and volatilities, both within the nations and across the borders. Such a

position in Bhutan and its socio-political stability has remained extremely important for India's East and

Northeast also, which shares 516 km long borders with Northeast India, and 183 km border with the state West

Bengal.

Bhutan, like its other small neighbour Nepal, is situated in the eastern Himalayas, and is landlocked between the world's two most populous nations; India to the south and China to the North. As narrated by Laxman Rathore:

Situated on the southern slopes of Himalayas, between Tibet in the North and India in the South, the small independent state of Bhutan

occupies a significant position between the sovereign democratic Republic of India and the People's Republic of China. It is bounded on the east by a tract inhabited by the tribal people, and on the west by the state of Sikkim and the district of Darjeeling. The whole of Bhutan presents a succession of

lofty and rugged mountains running generally from north to south and separated by deep valleys. The area is

18,000 sq. miles and the population little over 8 lakhs completely Tibetan on stock, culture and outlook (1997: 275).

Thus, the breadth of this narrow mountainous country from Tibet to India borders about 90 miles and is sparsely populated by a Mongoloid tribe known as Duk-pa (Satya Paul 1997: 266). Unlike Nepal, which has a history of

political volatility, Bhutan has maintained its political stability and sovereignty, and has generated least

threats across the borders. But the country itself as pointed out by Kharat is vulnerable due to its small size and strategic location. It is relatively compact with maximum north-south distance of 170 km and maximum

east-west distance of 300 km. Its geographic location with the landlocked nature isolates Bhutan from the rest of the world (Kharat 2004: 1661). As pointed out by Clements R. Markham, the simplicity of their manners and their least interaction with strangers, and a deep sense of religion have been preserving the people of Bhutan from

many vices. They are strangers to falsehood, ingratitude and dishonesty (Markham 1997: 258). The country mostly has maintained a very cordial relation with its neighbour India. According to Drakpa

(2012), despite being nestled in the Himalayas between two giant and populous countries in the world, China and India, Bhutan remained secluded for centuries. The monarchy was instituted in Bhutan only in the

first decade of the 20th century, at a time when this institution was in decline elsewhere and republican ideas were on the rise.

And today Bhutan is the only surviving monarchy in South Asia, even its close neighbour Nepal has dismantled such a monarchy from the country and is struggling to set up a federal structure. The monarchy, as pointed out by

Rose, has traditionally held all executive power, secured political stability for the kingdom for much of the

19th and 20th centuries through external alliances with British Empire and later with India (Baruah 2004: 72).

Bhutan also is the only Mahayana Buddhist kingdom in the world. In the year 2008, Bhutan took the first step

towards becoming a democracy with the introduction of a constitutional monarchy (Drakpa 2012). Bhutan's early

history is steeped in mythology and remains obscure. It may have been inhabited as early as 2000

BCE, but not much was known until the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism in the 9th century CE when turmoil in Tibet forced many monks to flee to Bhutan. In the 12th century CE, the Drukpa Kagyupa school was established and remains the dominant form of Buddhism in Bhutan till today. The country's political history is intimately tied to its religious history and its relations with various monastic schools and monasteries. The consolidation of Bhutan occurred in 1616 when Ngawana Namgyal, a lama from Tibet, defeated three Tibetan invasions, subjugated rival religious schools, codified an intricate and comprehensive system of law, and established himself as ruler (*shabdrung*) over a system of ecclesiastical and civil administrators. After his death, infighting and civil war eroded the power of the shabdrung for the

next 200 years when in 1885, Ugyen Wangchuck was able to consolidate power and cultivated closer ties with the British in India. In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was elected as the hereditary ruler of Bhutan, crowned on 17 December 1907, and installed as the head of state *Druk Gyalpo* (Dragon King). Since then the Wangchuck dynasty has remained the ruler of Bhutan. Much later in 1952, when Ugyen Wangchuck was succeeded by his son Jigme Dorji

Wangchuck, Bhutan began to emerge with a new phase of development. It started breaking its isolation and began a programme of planned development. Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971, and during his tenure the National Assembly was established and a new code of law, as well as the Royal Bhutanese Army and the High Court were also introduced. In 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended the throne at the age of 16 years and followed the same path of development. He emphasised upon modern education, decentralisation of governance, the development of hydroelectricity and tourism and improvements in rural developments. He was, perhaps, best known internationally for his overarching development philosophy of GNH. It recognises that there are many dimensions to development and that economic goals alone are not sufficient. Satisfied with Bhutan's

transitioning democratisation process, he abdicated in December 2006 rather than wait until the promulgation of the new constitution in 2008. His son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, became King upon his abdication. Bhutan thus has remained as pointed out by Tobgay, a Buddhist Kingdom under Wangchuck rulers with a population of around 700,000, which most importantly has never been colonised in the past. The country has attempted modernisation and urbanisation but has not achieved much of economic progress. For example, it still remains a primarily agrarian economy with more than 79 per cent of the people deriving their livelihood from subsistence agriculture (Tobgay 2005). Despite such economic situation, which the United Nations lists as the least developed countries (LDC) in the world, as pointed out in the *Encyclopedia of Bhutan*, its focus has not deviated from maximising Gross National Happiness. Interestingly, it emphasises economic development with preservation of the traditional

Buddhist culture and the country's spectacular natural environment. To maintain such harmonious development, it has forbidden immigration and tourism is controlled under a strict regime to guard against corrupting influences.

Bhutan persistently has been maintaining a very peaceful and cordial relation with independent India. With India's Independence in 1947, its new government also recognised Bhutan as an independent country. In 1949, India and Bhutan signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which provided that India would not interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs but would guide Bhutan in its foreign policy and support its economic development. Thus, the

driving force so far behind most of the economic growth in Bhutan has been India's persistent support on various development projects, with special emphasis on the construction of hydroelectric projects to service its own

market, with spinoffs in transportation improvements, the construction industry and

energy-intensive manufactures. The power projects mainly relied on migrant Indian labour force and expertise as Bhutan's labour force capabilities has been limited. Thus, hydropower has remained a major engine of growth and public revenue in the medium term, and the Royal Government of Bhutan has ambitious plans for this sector. The kingdom still has the potential to develop a capacity of 23,760 MW, of which only 5 per cent has been tapped so far. Bhutan and India have agreed to develop 10 hydropower projects, six under an intergovernmental model of 30

per cent grant and 70 per cent loan from India. Thus, such infrastructure growth and consequent structural

economic changes in Bhutan have been taking place with India's massive support through its public sector and

along with her financial support (Royal Government of Bhutan 2010). This has further strengthened the relations of these two neighbouring

nations.

BHUTAN AND INDIA'S FRONTIER

To understand India's frontier position with such a friendly neighbour like Bhutan, one necessarily needs to trace back to the historical discourse since the British period. According to Paul,

The East India Company came into contact with Bhutan for the first time when in 1773 the Company sent forces against Bhutan when the latter attacked and captured the Raja of Cooch Behar. After the defeat of Bhutan a Treaty of Peace was signed between Bhutan and the Company on 25th April 1774 by which Bhutan agreed to pay an annual

tribute to the Company of five Tangan horses, to free the Raja of Cooch Behar, and never to make any incursions into Company's territory and molest the rayats (1997: 268).

But later when the Company annexed Assam and the frontiers of Bhutan, hostilities again between the two broke out. Eventually the Company annexed permanently all the seven Assam Duars comprising some 1,600 sq. miles in the area and which lie at the foot of Bhutan Hills. British India, like other neighbours, attempted gradually to make a relation with Bhutan primarily for trade, market and economic purposes. While searching for a trade route to Tibet, Bhutan was explored during the second half of the 18th century and onwards as Bengal's route to Tibet

through Nepal had been closed by that period. The British subsequently took various favourable steps for the

Bhutanese traders, which also served their own interest to get an access to that

country. Four political missions were sent to Bhutan and Tibet, headed respectively by Bogle in 1774, Hamilton in 1776 and 1777, and Turner in 1783, to strengthen such trade and economic relations. The British

government also simultaneously took initiatives to establish a series of trade fairs, where both the plain and hill people of

this whole region could participate. This practice of organising trade fairs continued in the following century, where a large number of traders from Sikkim, Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan used to attend these fairs. These annual gatherings not only promoted British goods to a wider market but also strengthened the Anglo-Bhutanese relation, and pacified instability across the border. Such an attempt was also for maintaining peace at the Assam–Bhutan frontier, which became another prime objective of the British administration. British administration also

provided a series of facilities to Bhutan's trade and commerce by establishing weekly markets, called

haats, at suitable places where the Bhutanese traders and consumers could procure rice, cotton, dried fish, pigs, lac, tobacco, and other items. Such haats were also set up in several places in Darrang and Kamrup areas (Sarkar and Ray 2007: 1–21). Despite such attempts to promote commercial ties, as mentioned by Rathore, the British administration failed to maintain peace in this area, and they used to face frequent attacks on Assamese territory by the Bhutias of Bhutan. Finally, the Bhutan government was compelled to conclude such activities by signing the Sinchula treaty in 1865. By this treaty, Bhutan ceded Kalimpong and Duars to India and promised to stop Bhutani raids into British territory. In return the Wangchuck ruler of Bhutan was granted an annual subsidy of INR 50,000. Thereafter, the British influence grew steadily and Bhutan was brought into closer relation with India (Rathore 1997). The Sinchula treaty, thus, provided a congenial environment for mutual peace and friendship between Bhutan and British India. This treaty was based on the philosophy of *laissez faire* which swept the

British society around the mid-19th century. This free trade philosophy was contained mainly in article IX of the treaty, which abolished the contemporary duty on the import and export of the Bhutanese goods in

India and also on the British goods imported in Bhutan or transported through it. Such inter-country trade relation found a

different direction in 1910, when British rulers went a step further and another treaty was signed between them, called the Punakha treaty. Under this treaty, the British administration made the Bhutan government seek advice mandatorily from the British government in its external relation with other countries.

This treaty enabled the British to trade in Bhutan by controlling its external affairs with other countries

(Sarkar and Ray 2007: 1–21). The annual allowance increased up to INR 100,000 a year. This treaty disposed of

claims made by China and provided a safeguard against Chinese aggression. In the same year the Chinese government formally claimed Bhutan as a feudatory and was informed by the British minister at Peking that Bhutan was

independent of China and its external relations were under the British government, which would not tolerate any attempt by China to exercise any influence over Bhutan. Since then the British relation with Bhutan continued

uninterruptedly (Rathore 1997: 275). This treaty was, thus, a geo-political strategy of British administration in the context of China's invasion of Tibet (1910–12) and its subsequent claims on Bhutan. Although this treaty

served to expel any claims that China might have tried to make, it did not define Bhutan's status technically or legally. And for the Bhutanese, this was a source of uncertainty over its relations with India at the time that the British rule was nearing an end.

When in 1947 the British left India, it inherited all the external obligations and treaty relations with the bordering nations, which were mostly neighboured by the Northeast frontier region. Thus, immediately after

India's Independence in 1947, 'standstill agreements' with Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet were signed to continue

existing relations until new agreements were made. For Bhutan, its status became clearer following Nehru's

invitation for a Bhutanese delegation to participate in the Asian Relations Conference in 1947. Following this, the negotiation for a fresh Indo-Bhutan Treaty started in the summer of 1949. Thus India established her

diplomatic relations immediately in the post-Independence period in 1949 by signing a fresh Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which henceforth governed the relations between the countries (Choden 2004: 114–15). Such a treaty enabled India to take control of the external relations of Bhutan in return of an annual subsidy of INR 5 lakh.

It was officially stated that this fresh treaty was meant to regulate in a friendly manner and upon a solid and durable basis the state of affairs caused by the termination of the British government's authority in India and promote and foster relations of friendship and neighbourliness between independent India and Bhutan. The guiding principle of this treaty was to see that the ruler of Bhutan was prepared to show the same sense of close

association with India as demanded by past history as well as the facts of geographic

contiguity in this strategic area (Rathore 1997: 276). The spirit of this treaty became clearer after Prime

Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's address to the people of Bhutan, which says that:

Some may think that since India is a great and powerful country and Bhutan a small one, the former might wish to exercise pressure on Bhutan. It is therefore essential that I make it clear to you (Bhutanese people) that our wish is that you should remain an independent country and taking the path of progress according to your will. At the

same time, we two (India and Bhutan) should live as friendly neighbours, helping each other. The freedom of both Bhutan and India should be safeguarded so that no one from outside can do any harm to them (Paul 1997: 266).

Such a treaty ended the uncertainty in India–Bhutan relations in the post-Independence period and since then this relationship followed a positive trajectory. Even China recognised India's special relation with Sikkim and

Bhutan. In his first visit to Bhutan in 1958, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru further reiterated India's wish

that Bhutan remain an independent country, taking the path of progress according to country's own will. Such

diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were more effective with the appointment of a resident

representative of India in Thimphu in 1968, and prior to that the bilateral relations were looked after by an

Indian Political Officer in Sikkim. Despite such history of good relations between Bhutan and India, the

bilateral border issues went long unresolved. Bhutan is bounded on three sides by India. From east to west, the Indian states of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh (formerly the NEFA) border Bhutan. India

shares a 699 km-long border with Bhutan along Sikkim (32 km), West Bengal (183 km), Assam (267 km), and Arunachal Pradesh (217 km). Thus, as pointed out by Kharat, the southern part of Bhutan is surrounded by the plains of

Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam, and Sikkim and Darjeeling in the

west, and Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh in its east. Inaccessibility is one of the characteristic features of Bhutan. Geographical factors, such as thick forests, high mountain ranges, climatic conditions have made

Bhutan inaccessible from the east, west and also from the north. However, it maintains its relation and contact with the rest of the world through Indian territories, and Kolkata is the nearest airport and also the nearest seaport. And by road, it is only 750 km away from Phuntsholing (Indian border known as

Jaigaon) the main gateway town in Bhutan (Kharat 2004: 1661). Indo-Bhutanese borders had been delineated in the Treaty of Peace of 1865 between Bhutan and Britain, but it was not until the period between 1973 and 1984 that a detailed delineation and demarcation was made. Border demarcation talks with India generally resolved

disagreements except for several small sectors, including the middle zone between Sarbhang and Geylegphug and the eastern frontier with Arunachal Pradesh. According to Kharat,

Bhutan's geo-strategic location influences its political and economic relations with other countries. After the Sino-India war of 1962, the geo-strategic location of Bhutan continued to play a significant role in its security because it protects the Himalayan mountainous region of India and Indian states, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, which are all bordered by this country. Thus this part of the region helps India forming a

natural barrier against any aggression from China (ibid.).

Bhutan, therefore, becomes strategically a very important neighbour for India's East and Northeast, and its support and friendship are crucial for region's both security and development issues.

BHUTAN'S SUPPORT TO FIGHT AGAINST NORTHEAST INSURGENCY

Bhutan's commitment towards maintaining peace and neighbourly relation with India was proved right even after so many decades of signing such peace and friendship treaty in 1949. Thus, when India's frontier was blazing much later with the issue of insurgency in the decades 1980s and 1990s, and various non-state militant groups have

been taking shelter and support from neighbouring nations, Bhutan gave fullest support to the Indian Union by

protesting and then fighting against such activities of non-state actors. According to Mazumdar, though the

mutual respect for the provisions of the treaty has assured a high degree of political stability in Bhutan, but such stability was threatened by the presence of insurgent groups from India's Northeast region on Bhutanese soil in late 1990s (2005: 566). In the Indian front, in order to tackle the violent activities of Northeast insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of

Bodoland (NDFB) and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), the Indian Army launched 'Operation Bajrang' in Assam in November 1990. This has resulted in a large number of insurgents to flee to the neighbouring nation Bhutan, which shares a porous border with Assam (Rutland 1999: 293). As Northeast India's other neighbour Bangladesh with its pro-India Awami League leadership in 1996 was committed to crackdown many such insurgent camps within

Bangladesh, more and more insurgents therefore were fleeing and taking shelter in Bhutan. In the words of Anand Kumar, the most active Northeast outfit ULFA chose southern Bhutan as a base as this area was not very well

policed and thick jungles provided them suitable hiding places. Subsequently, Bhutan was then chosen by other

insurgent groups like NDFB and KLO. The terror groups preferred Bhutan as it was easy for them to carry out

attacks across the border in India and return back to their safe hideouts in southern Bhutan (Kumar 2010). The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB) initially ignored their presence; they had set up camps in the Samdrup Jongkhar districts of Southern Bhutan along the Indo-Bhutan border primarily to initiate attacks and threats in several parts of Northeast India and to create their hide-outs. The groups were not really threatening the internal

security of Bhutan in the initial period (Preisner 1998: 158). But the scenario was changing fast, and Bhutan

eventually started to bear the brunt in terms of disruption in her development activities and security of its

citizens. According to Kumar, the virtual illegal occupation of southern Bhutan by these terrorist groups started posing a serious challenge to its sovereignty. The state had actually started withdrawing from these areas by

closing down various institutions and commercial places. The terrorists were hampering other economic activities in Bhutan, besides affecting its trade and commerce. Work in large industries such as the Dungsum Cement Project was suspended. Educational institutions in terrorist-infested areas were closed down. Trade, agricultural

production and other commercial activities in several districts of the country were disrupted. Ordinary citizens were not feeling free to even travel across the country. Many became victims of threats, coercion and extortion.

Unprovoked attacks by the militants against Bhutanese nationals inside the country as well as those travelling through the Indian state of Assam, resulted in loss of innocent lives. Thus, the disturbances and internal

threats in the southern parts of Bhutan, where insurgent camps were located started to surface and became

frequent by 1999 and by the year 2003, the Royal Government began to see these

insurgents as the direct threat to the security of Bhutanese nationals. To meet such security challenges, as

pointed out by Kharat, which had hit the Indo-Bhutan border area and the people across the area, the Indian

government proposed to initiate a Joint Indo-Bhutan Army operation to drive out the Northeast militants from

Bhutan. But the Government of Bhutan did not respond and decided to take its own action. Thus, the 78th Session of Bhutan's National Assembly, *Tshongdu*, held in June 2000 passed a resolution of the four-point Action to flush out the insurgents from their territories. They were to cut off the ration supplies to the militants,

punish all groups and individuals who would be found in helping the militants by invoking the National Security Act, pursue the process of dialogue with the militants to allow them to leave Bhutan peacefully, and finally if these actions failed, military action would be adopted (Kharat 2004: 1662).

Bhutan government started initiating dialogue and other congenial measures with the militant groups to handle this issue and tried to persuade insurgents to leave the kingdom peacefully. But, after several round of talks, it had become almost certain that the militants had no intention of leaving the soil of Bhutan. In all the

meetings that were held between Bhutan and the insurgent groups, Bhutan sent its top officials. On the other

hand, insurgents were represented only at the middle level. Some ULFA leaders were of the opinion that leaving Bhutan would be as good as bidding goodbye to their cause, for which they were not ready. Bhutan, however, was determined to remove such major irritant in its relationship with India despite serious threats from the

militants. The Bhutanese king was therefore trying to opt for several alternative ways to resolve the issue, and was dithering before taking military action as he was not sure of the military power of Bhutan. Its forces had not been used for more than a century. Bhutan also knew that action against the insurgents would make them

hostile against the Bhutanese citizens and even the Royal Bhutan Army. Most importantly, the Bhutanese people had to travel through the Indian territory to reach southern Bhutan. But when all such sincere efforts failed, and when there were direct and increasing evidences of threat to its sovereignty and security by the militants of

Northeast India, Bhutan had to adopt its last military action. According to Kumar (2010), it has also been

suggested by some that the decision to take military action against the militants was

also expedited by the formation of the Bhutan Communist Party (Marxist–Leninist–Maoist) on 22 April 2003. This party wanted to abolish monarchy and establish a ‘true and new democracy’ in Bhutan. It was also feared that one of the insurgent groups, the KLO was in league with the Bhutanese and Nepalese Maoists. Thus, the emerging Maoist threat probably also have forced the king, who was already under the pressure from India to act against these

groups (ibid.). Such a situation forced Bhutan to take military action against Indian insurgent groups under the codename ‘Operation All Clear’ on 15 December 2003, where 6,000 persons of strong Royal Bhutanese Army (RBA)

launched simultaneous attacks on the ULFA, NDFB and KLO camps in the southern districts of Bhutan to oust them from its territory. At the time of the operation, there were over 3,000 heavily-armed Indian separatists

belonging to these three different groups based in Bhutan. They were operating from 30 camps inside the kingdom.

Out of these 30 camps, 13 camps belonged to the ULFA, the NDFB had 12, and the remaining five camps were of the KLO. Such an operation was RBA's first military action in 140 years and by 19 December, just five days into the operation, all 30 camps had been overrun and captured. It was a highly successful operation for the RBA, which earned the admiration of the Bhutanese people and the Government of India (Mazumdar 2005: 571–77). To counter and protest such military operations of the Bhutanese army, extremists have tried to disrupt the normal economic and trade relations between the two bordering nations. Thus, as pointed out by Mazumdar, in December 2003, ULFA

called for suspension of all trade ties between Bhutan and the people of the Northeast region, asserting that the Bhutanese were now the enemies of the Assamese, Bodos and Kamtapuris and would serve 'quit notices' to the

Bhutanese citizens, who had settled in the region or had business interest here, though Indian authorities

promised to provide adequate protection to the Bhutanese people. Thus during the RBA operation, the trade and

business between Assam's Nalbari district and Bhutan's Samdrup Jongkhar district were adversely affected and the markets in the area were closed. The Royal Government of Bhutan also had banned the movement of people to and

from Bhutan in order to prevent the insurgents from escaping, causing economic hardship for the local people

(ibid.: 577–78).

This was indeed a historic achievement for a small nation like Bhutan. The country, with a small army, was hardly in a position to take any such effective counterinsurgency operation. It, therefore, took 12 long years for Bhutan to launch an operation against the insurgents of Northeast India.

As pointed out by Bhaumik, Bhutan unlike other neighbours of Northeast India, has never made any secret about the presence of Northeastern

insurgent groups in its land, and sincerely persuaded such rebel groups to leave Bhutan.

So it had launched 'Operation All Clear' in the year 2003 to drive out such insurgent groups from its mountainous terrain. Such a comprehensive one-month-long offensive against the bases of the groups like ULFA and NDFB was

successful to shift rebel bases from Bhutan. This 'All Clear' operation has then become India's best inspiration for moving away from the 'insurgent crossfire' model to one of trans-regional co-operation with neighbours to

control such transborder insurgent activities in Northeast India (Bhaumik 2009: 177–79). Thus, the Bhutanese

action did set an example of co-operation in counter-terrorism in south Asia. The amount of risk taken by Bhutan to uproot the terrorists from its territory has increased the importance of its action manifold. Even countries like Bangladesh were prompted to say that they have sealed their borders with India to prevent Indian insurgents fleeing Bhutan or Myanmar from entering its territory (Kumar 2010). Such a military operation also reminded us that Bhutan did not fail to fulfil its trustworthy relation with India and, unlike other neighbouring nations, it did not fuel the issue of insurgency through various strategic and financial supports. Bhutan rather stood alone to protest against such underground activities, and denied vehemently to provide any lingering support and

shelter to such outfits in its land, and maintained the trust and friendship with the Indian Union and has

demonstrated completely a different example.

The most important outcome of the operation may be said to lie in the pressure that it has applied on Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar. All these countries are known to be playing host to a number of anti-India terrorists

through this frontier. Myanmar then expressed its willingness to take action against militant camps in its

country. It may be recalled that in 1995, 'Operation Blue Bird' was carried out jointly along the Mizoram–Myanmar border. But, on the contrary, with the power transfer within the country, Bangladesh made the strategy to deny the presence of Indian insurgents in its territory. On 5 January 2004, India submitted a fresh list of 180 camps in Bangladesh along with the names of 85 prominent insurgents after a meeting of BSF–BDR and India's attempts to many other such counter-insurgency measures along with the neighbouring nations continued. But 'Operation All Clear' still remains historic, which not only strengthened and reassured the neighbourhood relations, but became the main concurrent theme at the SAARC summit of 2004, where emphasis was

given to fight terrorism together within South Asia. As pointed out by Banerjee and Laishram, the Summit was

historic for having signed the Additional Protocol on the Suppression of Terrorism. The Protocol seeks to deal particularly with the financing of the terrorist network by making it a criminal offence to willingly or with

knowledge make financial contributions for any terrorist cause. Its positive impact was quickly felt when

Pakistan passed an amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997. The new provisions seek to double jail terms for any individual or entity involved in the financing of terrorism and it has made the offence a non-bailable one.

The positive signs of larger security co-operation are available and it is now the duty of the governments not to allow it to fizzle out. Elsewhere, the Shanghai Co-operation Organization was inaugurated on 15 January. On the same day a regional anti-terrorist structure was unveiled in Tashkent and Uzbekistan, where it was discussed that terrorism is a global concern, and South Asia must fight its terrorism from within (Banerjee and Laishram 2004).

About the bilateral relations, such an act of Bhutan has not only reiterated the deep understanding with India, but also has made India's position better

to handle conflict situation in its Northeast region. New Delhi held Bhutan as a model for other nations in the region, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and urged them to

follow Bhutan's example. The Indian Prime Minister personally expressed gratitude to King Wangchuck for Bhutan's action against the insurgents. Bilateral relations became deep with the Indian economy and its aid (Mazumdar

2005: 580).

BEYOND INSURGENCY

Such a successful counter-insurgency operation undoubtedly was extremely helpful for the Indian Union to deal with Northeast India's cross-border insurgency operation. Such an operation also has left scope for future

economic ties in this border region. The security issue since then across the Bhutanese border has remained under control with continued co-operation with the Indian military. Such neighbourly relations have encouraged both the nations to go beyond security issue and to grow deeper development ties. According to Mazumdar, after this

operation, the trade routes to India became safe and Bhutanese citizens were no longer

subject to extortion and attacks by the insurgents. The market in the border regions of Assam reopened, and trade and other economic activities gradually were picking up. India was arguably the ultimate winner in this conflict.

The arrest and killings of 650 members of insurgent groups and the capture of so many other leaders was sure to have an impact on both the security and economic situations in the Northeast India (Mazumdar 2005: 580). On the other hand, in February 2007, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck signed another treaty with India, during his visit, which not only reflects the contemporary nature of our relationship but also lays the

foundation for their future development in the 21st century. This has removed the clause that India will 'guide' Bhutan's

foreign policy and allowing Bhutan to purchase military equipment from other countries. The updated India–Bhutan Friendship Treaty provides, amongst other things, perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and commerce and

equal justice to each other's citizens. India's bilateral political relations with Bhutan have then gradually

matured over the years and are presently characterised by close trust and understanding and extensive

co-operation in the field of economic development, particularly in the mutually beneficial sector of

hydroelectric power. India has, thus, become Bhutan's largest trade and development partner, providing

significant amounts of foreign aid and investment. Since 80 per cent of Bhutan's total trade is with India, the resulting macroeconomic environment makes it largely dependent on its southern neighbour. Hydropower perpetuates this economic dependence as it constitutes 45 per cent of Bhutan's total exports to India. Promising as this

figure is for Bhutan's national economic growth, India and Bhutan have embarked on a second phase of power

co-operation, with the aim of generating 10,000 MW of power by 2020. The decision to expand power trade was

originally announced after the first bilateral Empowered Joint Group of Ministers meeting which took place in

March 2009 in New Delhi (Bisht 2011). Such bilateral ties have grown deeper with several visits of high-level

delegates from both sides. Thus, over the past few years bilateral relations have evolved into a comprehensive partnership encompassing a wide range of issue areas — having hydro-power tops the list in development

co-operation, along with sharing information and intelligence and the hot pursuit of Northeast militant groups, who are trying to establish bases in Southern Bhutan. Such co-operation has made Indo-Bhutan relations exemplary in the otherwise turbulent neighbourhood (Bisht 2010).

As both these neighbouring nations have been consistently moving ahead on several

economic ties on the basis of trust and co-operation, a step further needs to be taken to strengthen the trust and capacity of the people across the bordering regions of India and Bhutan. Trade and other economic activities across the border, therefore, need to be broadened. Informal trade is an ongoing process in this open and porous border between Bhutan and India, though there is hardly any study available on this area. For example, the border trade and other economic activities between Bhutan and West Bengal has been taking place for a long time.

Jaigaon, the small town in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal is a gateway to Bhutan and its small town

Phuentsholing, and this passage has remained a thriving place for trade activities between the two bordering

places. This gateway also has access to Sikkim and Darjeeling. Another informal but common practice across this border as pointed out by Tashi Choden, is the operation of a wide range of businesses by Indian persons using the licenses of Bhutanese nationals as indigenous fronts. These include anything from small shops trading in petty consumer items to large-scale investment businesses such as construction. The prevalence of small-scale Indian investment as well as business fronting is understandably concentrated in southern part of Bhutan owing to

proximity of bordering Indian towns. Thus, both Phuntsholing and Jaigaon are the centre of commercial hub across this border of India and

Bhutan (Choden 2004: 118). The other states of this frontier region Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, who border Bhutan have such small border towns, which need to be improved in terms of infrastructure and opportunities to improve the border trade with Bhutan. On 18 January 2012, the fair and craft bazar at Subankhata in Assam, which is 25 km away from Samdrupjongkhar town marked the opening of the Bhutan–Assam border, which had remained sealed for almost a decade on security issues. These small border towns were famous for trade with local products like vegetables, dry chillies, oranges, and cardamom. The revival of this trade route is expected to

bring economic vibrancy in this region again. The other twin districts Kokrajhar and Chirang of West Assam also border Bhutan, and local border trade in Datgiri and Gelephu towns near the India–Bhutan border in Chirang

district on Bhutan's border is a regular phenomenon. Such border trade can be encouraged more by regularising the exchange rate and improving other financial and physical infrastructure issues. For example, as reported, people living along this Indo-Bhutan border are finding it difficult to carry out their transaction due to the problem of currency exchange rates and the local people who depend heavily on such cross border economic activities become the worst sufferers. Therefore, both the countries need to set up a

currency exchange centre in the border areas to help the local traders (*The Times of India* 2012). Such a lack of transparency of official currency exchange facility in India is considered as the root cause behind the illegal trade. Apart from this, the issue of ethnic violence in this area of West Assam, which has been

destabilising the security of this region can also be sensitive for this border region, where Bhutanese people across the border can be the victim of such conflicts. For example, the large scale ethnic conflict that hit

Assam in July 2012 has significantly affected the border trade with Bhutan. The local people in border areas

become the worst sufferer of such violence. In the other border area of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan, the trade intercourse between the local people of both Bhutan and Tawang and West Kameng of Arunachal Pradesh has been

carried on in the traditional way since time immemorial. However, in order to facilitate the traders of both

sides and to boost the trade and commerce activities, an agreement was signed between the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of India on 28 February 1995, which identified 12 more trade routes as Free Trade Routes. Most of the local people of Arunachal Pradesh inhabiting the border areas of India and China generally prefer to go to Bhutan for shopping to meet their daily requirements instead of coming to Tawang due to the distance factor. The basic items on which the trade takes place are mostly primary agricultural products. Apart from economic and

trade activities, the cultural, social, racial, and religious affinities of the local people of both Bhutan and Tawang and West Kameng of Arunachal Pradesh also help immensely in several social intercourse and intermingling which indirectly encourage for growth and development of trade and commerce activities in the region. For

example, during the local festivals of Arunachal Pradesh like Torgya and Gorsam, thousands of Bhutanese visit the Tawang Monastery every year. Similarly, thousands of Arunachali local people visit Bhutan during their festivals like Churtem Kora and Gombey Kora as Buddhism is practiced by the people on both sides of the border (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 2011). However, such border is not free from other vices like drug trade. Thus, along border trade with mercantile products, cross-border trade on drugs also has remained an area

of concern here. As pointed out by Pushpita Das from the report of Narcotics Control Bureau, hashish and

marijuana/*ganja* are the two cannabis derivatives that have been traditionally trafficked from Nepal into India. Lately, a growing demand for

Nepalese and Bhutanese cannabis in India and a corresponding demand for

codeine-based pharmaceutical preparations as well as low-grade heroin in Nepal and Bhutan have resulted in two ways smuggling of narcotics and drugs through the India–Nepal and India–Bhutan borders. Well-developed road

networks as well as open and poorly guarded borders have facilitated large scale trafficking of drugs through

these borders. Cannabis grown in Bhutan are smuggled into India through the border trading points. Samdrup

Jongkhar-Daranga has been the most important route through which Bhutanese cannabis is smuggled into India since 1980s. Udalguri in Darrang district of Assam is an important centre for the collection and distribution of

cannabis smuggled in from Bhutan (Das 2012: 20–24). Such areas of concerns across the border of India's Northeast and Bhutan can be resolved through border security vigilance and by providing more emphasis on vibrant legal

trade on mercantile products.

Despite such issue of drug trade, this is one of the most peaceful and secure borders for Northeast India. This is primarily because both Bhutan and India embarked upon the road of friendship and co-operation, and the

leadership and common people of both the nations trusted each other. Such road of friendship and co-operation

between the two nations demonstrated that the most pertinent issue of insurgency and its cross-border activities, which has been sensitising Northeast India for such a long period of time can be dealt with mutual understanding and trust. This ultimately benefits both neighbours and can usher hope to the people across the borders. This

unbroken journey of peace and mutual trust between these two neighbours need to be pursued deeply and can be

cited as a model of friendship and co-operation in South Asia. This unbroken journey has benefitted India's East and Northeast most, which otherwise has been badly hit by cross-border conflict and violence from other

neighbouring nations for so many decades.

Epilogue

From Conflicts to Co-operation

NEGOTIATING SECURITY AT THE FRONTIER: WAY FORWARD

The blowing winds of political change in Northeast India's neighbours — Bangladesh and Myanmar — has renewed the hope for a new vista in this 'troubled periphery'. Good neighbourhood relations, which was almost an impossible task till yesteryears can now find a roadmap for the region. The 'frontier', which for last many decades suffered economic isolation primarily for the British policy of advancement and encroachment, eventually became a 'troubled periphery' with India's Independence, and was in the perpetual domain of security issues in the post-Independence period. This is largely due to the neighbourhood factor which has been

persistently remained hostile and unfriendly for a long period of time except for Bhutan. With its unique

position of having five international neighbours, this borderland has been the victim of both historical

discourse and geographical stifling. The territorial and cross-border security issues have surpassed economy and development of the region for a very long period of time, which has affected various aspects of human security within the region, and have added miseries to the people in multi-faced manner. But with the present changing political scenarios in the neighbouring nations and the renewed emphasis of India's neighbourhood relations of the recently elected NDA government, this frontier region of India can hopefully look for a change having a very careful negotiation on the age-old security issue and with a forward looking initiative towards the development agenda with all these crucial and changing neighbouring nations. For example, the historic by-election on 1 April 2012, which has

put Aung San Suu Kyi in the Parliament is a ray of hope not only for Myanmar towards the doorstep of democracy, which was under military junta for almost half-a-century, but for the entire sub-region, which is connected through this country. According to Indrani Bagchi, the country, which is strategically located

between India and China, having world's most important sea lanes, rich mineral

resources, oils and gas, can surely make a milestone to the world and to this region of Asia Pacific through its recent *glasnost*, provided it can also 'balance' China relations well (Bagchi 2012). Myanmar's gradual policy of opening her economy can be an excellent opportunity for Northeast India per se. So long India was forced to support Myanmar's brutal military regime primarily for her Northeast India and its security concerns, but not so much for other reasons like oil and China issues. A terrible security dilemma made India support Myanmar's military junta so long by turning its back on Suu Kyi, who values India and her journey to democracy to a large extent. Such a strategy has worked to some extent, especially when the Naga insurgents were battered by the joint action by Indian and Myanmarese armies that they sued for negotiation, though many Indians have not realised it (Choudhuri 2012). Therefore, the sensitive cross-border ethnic issue, including the issue of Rohingya Muslim fishermen community, who have been evicted (around 140,000) from Western Myanmar's Sittwe town by the Rakhine Buddhist community (Nachtwey 2014: 26) needs careful policy steps. A large number of them are trying to get shelter in India's Northeast, which potentially puts fresh strain in the region. But with present gradual political reforms towards the path of democracy in Myanmar as announced by Thein Sien in 2011, India has promptly realised her more proactive role in all spheres of economic, political, security, social and cultural ties with her, and the historic visit of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 27–29 May 2012 is a gesture to it. This will not only strengthen India's relation with Myanmar along with its stand in Southeast Asia, but will also counter the China factor in the region and most importantly can benefit its troubled spot, Northeast India. The region, therefore, is possibly passing through the best time for transition in its post-

colonial period, as its other troubled neighbour Bangladesh also has made a stupendous political transition towards democracy. India's very careful, co-operative and courageous approach and negotiation is helping immensely to rebuild its trust with Bangladesh, and to help her troubled borderland at this hour of change, which was also unimaginable until few years ago. Bangladesh, on the other hand, has already taken various positive steps towards Northeast India to fight together the core issue of insurgency, and then to restore its bilateral cultural and economic links.

Bangladesh has expressed its willingness to become the gateway to Northeast India as a

natural bridge between dynamically thriving regions of south and Southeast Asia. As mentioned by Mr Tariq A.

Karim, the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India that, Bangladesh is ready to reconnect not only the states of Northeast to the rest of India, but also is ready to enable Nepal and Bhutan to gain access to the sea and can help India to reach Myanmar and Thailand overland through easy terrain and serve as the hub of regional linkages in all its modes — air, road, rail, and riverine and even digital connectivity (Karim 2012). India also has expressed her keenness on several such issues of connectivity, trade and commerce and for resolving various other border, water and security issues. The visit of India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Bangladesh on 6–7

September 2011 has focused on many such areas. Thus, for example, India has decided to remove 46 items from its negative list of trade with Bangladesh. India also has announced that Bangladesh can invest and hold up to 100

per cent equity in power generation schemes in India, particularly in the Northeast, which in turn would make Northeast Indian states investment friendly. Along with this the attempts have been taken to restore many of the traditional economic links like border haats to boost the local trade and commerce. Above all the both the countries have signed a Protocol on 6

September 2012 to the historic Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 to resolve the border related issues, which has been festering since 1947. This in all possibilities should resolve the tragic phenomenon of the 166 enclaves, with total population around 53,000, who had remained stateless for all practical purposes since 1947 and which had remained safe sanctuaries for various criminal activities in this region and had damaged bilateral relations. With such a land boundary solution, India would lose an estimated 10,000 acres but would recognise citizen rights in these areas. Having achieved such steps, the window of

opportunity now has been broadened for India's Northeast (ibid.). Bangladesh is also at the cross-road of

Islamist versus secularist fight, and its thousands of youth are being mobilised in this transition (*AIM*

Newswire 2013). If the youths of this nation succeed, there can be a drastic change in the Islamist force network and its activities in this entire region. The second victory of the Awami League in the parliamentary elections of 2014 reassures its support to India and the Northeast borderland. Such socio-political transition in both the troubled neighbours is the opportune time for Northeast India.

Bhutan, the other small neighbour, which has always remained a friend of India vis-à-vis Northeast India, has also stepped towards a pro-democratic set up along with monarchy. Its stable and good

relation with India, and very reasonable and balanced relation with China has helped India in general, Northeast India in particular, for encountering her insurgency issue. Bhutan has persistently shown very reasonable support and co-operation to resolve Northeast India's insurgency issue and thus exemplifies the best neighbourhood for Northeast India since Independence. Its consistent support and trust has made it a friendly and reliable

neighbour of this frontier. Bhutan being a small landlocked nation also depends extensively on India for its own development and infrastructure

and has made good economic links with India. Such a supportive and congenial neighbour will be extremely helpful for Northeast vis-à-vis for this whole region, which is under transition now.

India also leaves no stones unturned to continue these neighbourly relations, and the selection of this small neighbouring nation as the first foreign visit of India's newly elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi (in 2014) is a further indication of these ties.

China, on the other hand, has already expressed various gestures to open economic engagements with Northeast India. China's continuous and expanding economy is thriving for various economic engagements with its

neighbouring nations, and given Northeast India's proximity and its unexplored natural resources, China is keen to establish both connectivity network as well as economic ties. But Northeast needs to be cautious about China's troubled Tibet, which can be a cause of fresh concern to this frontier. The recent turbulence in Tibet against China can be a cause of fresh worry for Northeast India. One also needs to observe the silent protests that are going on both within and outside Tibet by thousands of Tibetans for pro-democracy movement. More than 90 monks and civilians have self-immolated in the last one year against Chinese government in Tibet (Patranobis 2012).

This desperate but silent desire for democracy and anger against Chinese rule might lead to some fresh

cross-border sensitivity in India's Northeastern part, and India needs to be extra careful at this hour,

especially with Arunachal Pradesh. But on the other side, it is encouraging to see that China is keen to engage herself in the region through connectivity, trade and cultural links. And now after so many decades both India and China have taken up the issue of border disputes, which can bring another ray of hope to Northeast India. As pointed out by Leon Bai, even after the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding

Principles for the Settlement of the Boundary Question in 2005, both countries have hardly shown any

interest in settling the issue of border dispute and never completed the exchange of maps detailing each party's perception of its LAC (Bai 2012). But the recent initiative in December 2012 from both the sides to settle such boundary issue with the change in regime power in China is a commendable move. Both the nations now have put on record the 18 points of bilateral agreement on the vexed border issue, and China finally showed its readiness to move ahead on settling the 3,488 km LAC (Gupta 2012: 10). A 'common understanding' report has been prepared by both India and China reviewing the long-running negotiations on a framework for settling the boundary dispute. It also has touched upon the issue of transborder rivers and exchange of data (Krishnan 2012). This is an

encouraging move and Northeast India can eventually rid itself of the fear of the China threat on boundary issues. India's newly-elected government also is keen to continue the dialogue and resolve border disputes between the nations.

Lastly, the other small Himalayan neighbour of this region, Nepal is also passing through a turbulent phase to restore democracy and federal structure. India needs to understand and be careful about Nepal's recent internal problems. As India's East and Northeast have proximity to Nepal, it needs to be vigilant about fresh cross-border activities and inflow of people. With the change in the Indian government, it is also essential to put an

emphasis on neighbourhood policy towards Nepal through the development paradigm. According to Ghimire,

collaboration on hydel power projects, which in the past had failed to generate the much-needed trust and result, can be one potential area to revive relations and to benefit the neighbouring regions. The Pancheshwar

Multipurpose Project (PMP), signed between Nepal and India in 1996 as part of the Mahakali Treaty has not seen much result, implying the lack of co-operation between the nations. With the recent changing waves, such

co-operation needs to be strengthened for future roadmap (Ghimire 2014). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal, after 17 years, in August 2014 and his willingness to revisit the Peace and Friendship treaty (of 1950) could be of major significance to the neighbourhood relations between the two nations. Thus, all these

neighbouring nations of Northeast India, which have been passing through difficult phases for last several decades made direct impacts on both security and development issues to their neighbouring frontier Northeast India. But such phases are changing now, and these troubled nations are stepping

towards their political journey to democracy, which only can usher long term and stable political and

socio-economic atmosphere for this entire region.

Therefore, a common chord that has recently bound all these neighbours of Northeast India is a desire for political transition towards achieving democracy, and improving neighbourly relations with India. This is

important and unique scenario for Northeast India, which is bound to have reflection in the long run. It is understood that Northeast India cannot restore peace and stability and then to grow without the stability of her neighbouring nations. So the whole region needs to move ahead together through such rigorous political

transition. The post-colonial Northeast, which has so long been a sore trouble spot for India, whose cross-border activities had heightened the security concerns, was in urgent need to recast its regional relations. But instead of making useful negotiations with the neighbouring nations for herself, this borderland has made political and security compromises, and subsequently has been facing several security challenges. It has remained as a failed region and reflected as a 'periphery' of India, the term that was coined at the height of colonial era, more prominently than before. During the post-colonial period therefore the region never had the opportunity to recast her regional relations. This is because of two parallel reasons, first,

India's overall regional role, its market co-operation and development engagement towards her East and Southeast neighbours has remained ad hoc in nature for a very long period of time for which the interest of Northeast frontier was shied away, and second, all the neighbouring nations of Northeast were politically hostile and their internal problems were largely reflected through several cross-border activities, for which this borderland of Northeast India suffered, and failed all along, and never could take centre-stage to define its own destiny. But now, along with such transitions in the neighbourhood, the region also has begun to shed its past, and in recent times, one can see the changing waves even within the region. Many of Northeastern states after so many years has seen the first signs of peace and political stability, giving rise to hope and optimism among the people. For example, in volatile states, such as Tripura, Nagaland and Assam to certain extent, a decisive political vision and leadership have slowly started transforming the pains of past into the hopes of present. This has slowly started ushering in trust and

confidence to its people. Leaders such as Manik Sarkar, Neiphiu Rio, Tarun Gogoi deserve great applause for their abilities to bring back the rule of law through their efforts in governance,

development and counter insurgency measures. Mizoram and Meghalaya are also in the list where militancy is almost a thing of past now and is not at forefront. Even Manipur, the most disturbed state, is comparatively a quiet frontier. Sikkim of course is always the best state in the region. Therefore, negotiation and dialogue at this point of time with both big and small insurgent groups across the region is important, so that transition becomes easier. These cluster of states are now making efforts to understand the importance of political stability, and people are gradually becoming aware of their future need of development. The civil society is becoming conscious about the role of various divisive and insurgent groups, who at one point of time supported such forces. It is now clear that such forces can never bring any solution to the problems of the region. Ages of disconnect from all sides of heartland India and neighbouring countries along with the terrible intra-regional inaccessibility had perpetuated this borderland to breed with several sets of puzzles and utter lack of

development. Along such disconnect, the region has witnessed severe deprivation and failure of both development and governance, where people suffered and provided fertile grounds for aggravating conflicts, insurgency, political violence, organised crime, drug trafficking, infectious diseases, refugee flows, and mass migration, which had cascading effects across the borders of these weak states quite destructively. Such problems have perpetually eroded the security and well-being of people of this borderland. But such transnational phenomena and their spill-over is not unique in this borderland of India, rather many such areas across the world are similarly affected, and therefore several attempts were also made to assess the power and strength of such spill-over at various levels, which potentially encounters several risks. In some nation, such spill-overs were attempted to be assessed with some methods and models, and the World Bank has remained the pioneer on this experiment. Thus, one such way is to assess the faultlines and development, which has been used in case of China to see its ability to sustain rapid economic growth, given the fault lines through external distraction like poverty, unemployment, social unrest, corruption, diseases, financial fragility, and investment scenario (Eberstadf 2003). India's Northeast is one such ideal place to understand such spill-over effect of the faultlines through transnational activities.

Northeast India's faultlines through recurring ethnic and inter-community violence, rise of various militant groups and power imbalance, land and resource rights issues and immigration have

remained major actors for unsustainable development. An emphasis, therefore, within the region on political co-operation and political entrepreneurship is essential to deal with such faultlines and then move ahead with economic development agenda. Because as argued correctly by Rahul Tripathi, citing SAARC nations, says that the aspiration for economic consensus needs political consensus of the nations, as the former mostly have remained mired in political conflicts — both internal and crossborder that often impede the regional spirit (Tripathi 2008: 29–30).

ENVISIONING ECONOMY AT THE FRONTIER

Such a geo-political change across the border that is on board can be extremely useful to drive its economy, market and growth in the coming years, which can finally provide human security to this region. Human security, broadly understood as the freedom from want and fear, needs to be achieved and emanated from economic growth and human development, and therefore potentials for conflict which retards such growth and development need to be minimised through a continuous political, institutional and individual negotiations and efforts. In this regard the region needs to grow and develop through such continuous negotiations, which ultimately can usher

transnational trusts and ties. This prima facie can boost the optimism and confidence of the economic players with regional investments, collaborations, trades, and market. Along with restoration of trust, the region must emphasise on physical connectivity network to make transnational collaboration a success, which so far has remained another major faultline in the region. The region also has begun to realise intensely the importance of connectivity. The initiative has already started. In fact Tripura, which is one of the most isolated mass of land, has made tremendous efforts to create its connectivity network. It has opened several border routes and has restored road connectivity with Bangladesh. This has increased the mobility of people and products, and has gained in areas of trade, economy and cultural relation with Bangladesh. More efforts are on the way through opening of Chittagong port. The historic visit of Sheikh Hasina to the state in January 2012, and her assurance on such issue is an open gesture to it. Meghalaya, the other state of this region, also is silently improving the border relations with Bangladesh and very recently, the historic attempt to reopen the border haats is the most positive gesture to restore their organic and age-old relations. Such border haats are

meant to be the places where sellers can sell once or twice a week the local agricultural and horticultural products, spices, minor forest products (excluding timber), fresh and dry fish, dairy and poultry products, cottage industry items, wooden furniture, handloom and handicraft items. For transaction of such products, no local tax would be imposed on the trading and both Indian and Bangladeshi currencies will be accepted. These border

haats were once the thriving centres of trade and commerce across the borders of these two nations and the Northeast used to get the benefit out of it. But they were shut down after Bangladesh was carved out in 1971 and Northeast India's economic openings were painfully closed. Tripura also is on the way to open such haats across its Bangladesh border. Manipur needs to take a lesson from this and needs to observe the change in Myanmar very keenly, so that it can also rebuild her relation with Myanmar in appropriate time, which will solve many of her internal problems, which has strong cross-border connection. The Moreh–Tamu route for border trade is already open, but more efforts are needed to make such border as vibrant as the Tripura–Bangladesh border. A recent report says that the initiative has already begun with a meeting of India–Myanmar Border Trade Committee held at Moreh in November 2012. The committee has agreed to open one branch of the United Bank of India in Yangon. Such a committee would meet once every three months alternatively in India and Myanmar to ensure a fair border trade system. The committee also suggested expanding the existing trade items with the addition of at least 20–25 items to the existing 40 tradable items under barter trade mechanism through Moreh. Major exportable items include cement, engineering goods, transport equipment, motor cycles, iron and steel, medicine, chemicals and allied products, and cotton yarn (Mayum 2012).

India's Myanmar Policy, where Northeast India tends to receive the priority along with development and economic initiatives, is a way forward to envision her economy through such various measures. Thus, by extending a USD 500

million line of credit to Myanmar as part of 12 agreements on security and development of border areas, trade and revival of transport links, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had mentioned that 'stronger trade and

investment links, development of border areas, improving connectivity and building capacity and human resources are areas that I hope to focus in Myanmar' (*Hindustan Times* 2012). Similarly,

states like Sikkim by reopening Nathu La with China, Assam by resolving border disputes with Bangladesh, and Mizoram keenly waiting for the Kaladan multi-model project to begin with Sittwe of Myanmar, are making attempts for finding linkages with neighbours. Arunachal Pradesh now awaits an opening while it continues to suffer from economic isolation and border threats from China and Myanmar. But the state also can have an opening through a historic route like Stilwell Road, which can immediately connect her to Myanmar and China. Thus, the long

standing issue of making Myanmar the strategic gateway to Southeast Asia for India, the connectivity issue needs to be a reality for Northeast India. As reported, the reopening of the long awaited Stilwell Road, the

Imphal–Mandalay route, which is part of the Old Southern Silk Route and is a part of ambitious Asian Highway route are the priorities now. These can promote the cross-border trade and economic growth in Northeastern states. The reopening of the historic 1,739 km Stilwell Road is strategically important as it connects Northeast India, Northwest Myanmar and Southwest China. A fresh thought is already given to this route as potential passage for socio-economic development of the future generation of this contiguous region. All the Northeastern chief ministers for the first time had come to a consensus and had requested former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to reopen the route. Mr Tarun Gogoi, who is taking initiatives and is a Tai Ahom himself, mentions once that

the gateway of India in Bombay facing west. It is time to build another gateway at Ledo, facing east, symbolising a reunion with the past yet heralding the future and a great new beginning. He mentions that there is no second opinion among the regional heads of Northeast now to allow this legendary road to reopen. It is therefore

desirable for the central government to take steps to make this dream of the local people turn into a reality which would boost trade and commerce (*The Myanmar Times* 2007).

Among the three nations, through which this road runs, China has already pursued the idea of reopening with diligence and has repaired and reconstructed its stretch of the road with a six-lane expressway. But on the contrary, Myanmar was long indecisive, as it passes through its jungle-covered mountains and swampy valleys of Kachin state, the most insurgency prone area, and thus India was in a fix about it. But finally the ray of hope was seen, as Myanmar has agreed to honour a long-standing need of the region by re-opening the Stilwell Road to facilitate trade among China, India and Myanmar. In the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) at the 5th North East Business Summit at Kolkata in January 2010, Myanmar Foreign Minister, Nyan Win gave his assurance of reopening the Stilwell Road. He said that China has already constructed the road up to Tanai of Kachin district and ‘there is a balance portion from Tanai to the Indian border which can now be completed with the support of the Govt of India’ (*The Assam Tribune* 2010). And now with the resurgence in India–Myanmar relations, this route has a strong possibility to reopen, and the aspiration of the people of Northeast India would be high to catch up with transborder business and economic activities. India now needs to initiate to build this part of the road from Ledo to Tanai via the Pangsau Pass, a stress of 230 km. This

emphasis on reopening the route has largely emerged from the local aspiration and local needs of Northeast India.

Border trade infrastructure of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh with Bhutan also needs to be improved, both in terms of physical and financial, which presently are in poor shape.

Northeast India’s strategy therefore needs to be focused more on improving cross-border connectivity, which can restore trade, investment, market, and economy. Such revival in engagement and economic ties can also find a way to resolve some of the long standing border disputes. Such a shift in strategy can eventually bring trust and people-to-people contacts, which can find a way to negotiate the long agonies of borders. Such an emphasis on connectivity was also felt way back in 1991, when India made a strategic shift in the foreign policy from West to East by introducing the

‘Look East’ policy, which wishfully thought of re-building lost relations with the fast growing East and Southeast Asian Nations and reviving the landlocked and conflict-prone borderland of the

Northeast by connecting it to these nations with Myanmar as the gateway. The country was forced to make such geo-strategic shift in relation with its East and Southeast Asian neighbours also because its most aligned post-Independence partner, the Soviet Union, collapsed and disintegrated in the same year, and India lost her strongest global partner and a staunch ally. Its crisis in foreign policy was as grave as her crisis in domestic economic policy, occurring at the same time and she urgently felt the necessity of having new regional and sub-regional partners beyond the SAARC zone. Thus, the ‘Look East’ policy was as

path-breaking as India’s ‘New Economic Policy’ in 1991. But for the people of Northeast, the policy brought a new hope, as the ‘Look East’ policy was also evolved with an idea of bringing the region closer to these neighbouring nations through connectivity, trade and economic engagement. The idea was also to bring the Northeast borderland from security to development paradigm by making connectivity with Southeast Asian countries, and conceptualising the region in a trans-regional economic space. This was expected to bring a solution to its long-standing

insurgency issues, human poverty and economic backwardness. This eventually was also to break India’s Northeast from its age-old peripheral status and to make it a strategic economic location, which can open up various possible economic interjections and collaborations with her neighbouring nations, which are culturally and economically aligned. Such strategic shift in India’s foreign policy was extremely necessary. There is an

increasing realisation of the Western economic crisis, primarily through the Euro zone and US economic hits, which has made a world-wide impact. India’s dependence on the West, therefore, essentially and strategically needs to be shifted towards the potential and prosperous East and Southeast Asian nations. In such a perspective, the country needs to focus on its

Northeast to make its 'Look East' policy more effective and which can gain economically from these eastern potential partners.

India indeed has made some success in the last 20 years of its journey in restoring relations with Southeast Asia through ASEAN platform and through various bilateral engagements under the first two distinct phases of the 'Look East' policy. But for the people of Northeast, the policy has remained notional as no visible and substantial transition has taken place till today. Now with the transitions in the neighbouring countries, India is in the most opportune moment to make the third phase of its 'Look East' policy proactive for the Northeast. 'Changing Myanmar' as pointed out by Choudhuri (2012) has already shown signals towards a pro-Indian approach, and is keen to restore and strengthen with various bilateral relations having Northeast India to play a pivotal role. The timely visit of India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after almost two-and-a-half decades on 28 May 2012

is bound to make a very positive impact in the region. New Delhi also, after a long gap, has made a determined effort to sidestep the security issues that has been dominating in India's Myanmar

Policy. As reported, Myanmar's military regime assured India that they would act against Northeast India's insurgents and anti-India groups on their territory. This assurance has come at the hour when more such insurgent groups like ULFA and NSCN have moved to northern Myanmar for sanctuary after the two years long crackdown and initiatives from Bangladesh by Sheikh Hasina government. It would necessitate sharing of intelligence between the two nations and strengthening military to military relations with Myanmar (Choudhuri 2012). Such a trust and co-operation, which Bhutan has already demonstrated will be helpful to make the region economy-friendly. The 'Look East' policy also urgently needs to be forceful in Northeast India in the context of China factor. Three out of five neighbours of the Northeast are positioned between India and China, which are Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, with China itself being one of the neighbours of Northeast. Therefore, India needs a very careful move while restoring her Northeast economic ties with such all these nations. This is because China's economic hold is much stronger, older, rooted, and

accomplished in some areas like Myanmar since the time of Deng Xiaoping, who filled the void in Myanmar's economy left by Western sanction. China has been much skilful to make a good grip over Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries and can be equally skillful to make her presence in this phase of transition in the whole region. So to encounter the 'China factor', India necessarily needs a much stronger diplomacy, so that Northeast India does not remain a storehouse of resources and a convenient economic passage.

But as the neighbouring countries are trying to sail towards democracy, India and its democratic institutions probably can be in a much better position here than China and its military regime to negotiate. Trade and energy immediately can shape India's foreign policy towards East and Southeast Asia, which could help its Northeast.

Northeast India can find a space in such transnational economic activities and can move ahead with the approach of developmental regional economic integration. James J. Hentz for example while speaking about South African context says that, developmental regional economic integration can promote greater regional interdependence and argues that such concept can be a reality, if the focus lies on equitable regional development. This also entails a high level of political co-operation and its intervention (Hentz 2005: 21–51). Regional economic market

co-operation and integration, on the other hand, also promotes regional

interdependence, but does so by progressively removing the barriers to economic activities between states in the region. This typically starts by reducing barriers to intra-regional trade such as tariffs, but later can include dismantling barriers to other factors of production, such as the movement of people. Thus, the process follows a linear succession from preferential trade area, to free trade area, customs union, common market, economic and monetary union and finally complete economic integration (Hentz 2005: 21–5). Such a concept can be thought of here by the gradual opening up of space through various ways such as building and restoring routes with

neighbouring nations, by opening more traditional markets (border haats) as the meeting points for people, by attempting some level of regional and sub-regional economic forum and by allowing investors to explore the land along with the emphasis on border trade and connectivity. Other initiatives of opening up and establishing new linkages would mean that the entire matrix of connectivity within the sub-region consisting of Northeast India, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal can hopefully change the scenario from conflict and security dynamics to co-operation and development dynamics. In this context, the region may experiment with several ad hoc regional co-operation on encountering security threats followed by local resource sharing and improving local economies. Thus, sub-national level exchanges between states, cities, towns and villages of Northeast and

neighbouring nations can bring forth the idea of creating number of satellite economic growth centres to offer benefits directly to the people of the region. If some such initiatives remain successful in creating certain degree of trans-regional economy, then possibly it can move steps further with stronger institutions of regional co-operation in days to come, as has happened in other parts of the world and a long lasting stability can be attained. This may find a way for the freedom from both fear and want for the people of the region, and can meet the demand, rights and aspiration in a balanced way, where safety and happiness for the people would matter the most. As Ken Booth, an authority on security studies while making a departure from state to people as the

referent object, argues:

Security means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing of people from those physical human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and

emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order produces true security.

Emancipation theoretically is security (cited in Multimer 1999: 319).

Emancipation is most important for the Northeast frontier of India. Its people need freedom from fear, and this continues to remain a challenging agenda for future research on this region.

Appendix

Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826. Reproduced with Permission from National Archives of India, New Delhi

TREATY OF PEACE between the Honorable East India Company, on the one part, and His Majesty the King of Ava on the other, settled by Major-General Sir Archibald Campbell, K. C. B., and K. C. T. S., Commanding the Expedition, and Senior Commissioner in Pegu and Ava; Thomas Campbell Robertson, Esq., Civil Commissioner in Pegu and Ava; and Henry Ducie Chads, Esq., Captain, Commanding His Britannic Majesty's and the Honorable Company's Naval Force on the Irrawaddy River, on the part of the honorable Company; and by Mengyee-Maha-Men-Hiah-Kyan-Ten Woongyee, Lord of Lay-Kaing, and Mengyee-Maha-Hlah-Thoo-Hali-Thoo-Atven-Woon, Lord of the Revenue, on the part of the King of Ava; who have each communicated to the other their full powers, agreed to and executed at Yandaboo, in the Kingdom of Ava, on this Twenty-fourth day of February, in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty-six, corresponding with the Fourth day of the decrease of the Moon Taboung, in the year One Thousand One Hundred and Eighty-seven Gaudma AERA, -1026.

ARTICLE 1.

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Honorable Company on the one part, and His Majesty the King of Ava on the other, ARTICLE 2.

His Majesty the King of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty States of Cachar and Jyntia. With regard to Munnipoor it is stipulated, that should Ghumbheer Sing desire to return to that country, he shall be recognized by the King of Ava as Hajah thereof.

ARTICLE 3.

To prevent all future disputes respecting the boundary line between the two great Nations, the British Government will retain the conquered Provinces of Arracan, including the four divisions of Arracan, Ramreo, Cheduba, and Sandoway, and His Majesty the King of Ava cedes all right thereto. The Unnoupectoumien or Arakan Mountains (known in Arakan by the name of the Yeomatoung or Pokhingloun Range) will henceforth form the boundary between the two great Nations on that side. Any doubts regarding the said line of demarcation will be settled by Commissioners appointed by the respective governments for that purpose, such Commissioners from both powers to be of suitable and corresponding rank.

ARTICLE 4.

His Majesty the King of Ava cedes to the British Government the conquered Provinces of Yeh, Tavoy, and Mergui and Tenassorim, with the islands and dependencies thereunto appertaining, taking the

Salween River as the line of demarcation on that frontier; any doubts regarding their boundaries will be settled as specified in the concluding part of Article third.

ARTICLE 5.

In proof of the sincere disposition of the Burmese Government to maintain the relations of peace and amity between the Nations, and as part indemnification to the British Government for the expenses of the War, His Majesty the King of Ava agrees to pay the sum of one crore of Rupees.

ARTICLE 6.

No persons whatever, whether native or foreign, is hereafter to be molested by either party, on account of the part which he may have taken or have been compelled to take in the present war.

ARTICLE 7.

In order to cultivate and improve the relations of amity and peace hereby established between the two governments, it is agreed that accredited ministers, retaining an escort or safeguard of fifty men, from each shall reside at the Durbar of the other, who shall be permitted to purchase, or to build a suitable place of residence, of permanent materials; and a Commercial Treaty, upon principles of reciprocal advantage, will be entered into by the two high contracting powers.

ARTICLE 8.

All public and private debts contracted by either government, or by the subjects of either government, with the others previous to the war, to be recognized and liquidated upon the same principles of honor and good faith as if hostilities had not taken place between the two Nations, and no advantage shall be taken by either party of the period that may have elapsed since the debts were incurred, or in consequence of the war; and according to the universal law of Nations, it is further stipulated, that the property of all British subjects who may die in the dominions of His Majesty the King of Ava, shall, in the absence of legal heirs, be placed in the hands of the British Resident or Consul in the said dominions, who will dispose of the same according to the tenor of the British law. In like manner the property of Burmese subjects dying under the same circumstances, in any part of the British dominions, shall be made over to the minister or other authority delegated by His Burmese Majesty to the Supreme Government of India.

ARTICLE 9.

The King of Ava will abolish all exactions upon British ships or vessels in Burman ports, that are not required from Burmah ships or vessels in British ports, nor shall ships or vessels, the property of British subjects, whether European or Indian, entering the Rangoon River or other Burman ports, be required to land their guns, or unship their rudders, or to do any other act not required of Burmese ships or vessels in British ports.

ARTICLE 10.

The good and faithful Ally of the British Government, His Majesty the King of Siam, having taken a part in the present War, will, to the fullest extent, as far as regards His Majesty and his subjects, be included in the above Treaty.

ARTICLE 11.

This Treaty to be ratified by the Burmese authorities competent in the like cases, and the Ratification to be accompanied by all British, whether European or Native, American, and other prisoners, who will be delivered over to the British Commissioners the British Commissioners on their part engaging that the said Treaty shall be ratified by the Right Honorable the Governor-General in Council, and the Ratification shall be delivered to His Majesty the King of Ava in four months, or sooner if possible, and all the Burmese prisoners shall, in like manner, be delivered over to their own government as soon as they arrive from Bengal.

Archibald Campbell.

Largeen Moonja, Woonghee.

*T.C. Robertson,
Civil Commissioner.*

Seal of the Lotoo.

Hy. D. Chads, Captain, Royal Navy.

Shwagum Woon, Atawoon.

ADDITIONAL ARTICLE

The British Commissioners being most anxiously desirous to manifest the sincerity of their wish for person, and to make the immediate execution of the fifth Article of this Treaty as little irksome or inconvenient as possible to His Majesty the King of Ava, consent to the following arrangements, with respect to the division of the sum total, as specified in the Article before referred to, into instalments, viz., upon the payment of twenty-five lacks of Rupees, or one-fourth of the sum total (the other Articles of the Treaty being executed), the Army will retire to Rangoon. Upon the further payment of a similar sum at that place, within one hundred days from this date, with the proviso as above, the Army will evacuate the dominions of His Majesty the King of Ava with the least possible delay, leaving the remaining moiety of the sum total to be paid by equal annual instalments in two years, from this Twenty-fourth day of February 1826 A.D., through the Consul or Resident in Ava or Pegu, on the part of the Honorable the East India Company.

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL

*LARGEN MEONJA, Woongee T. C. Robertson,
Civil Commissioner.*

*Seal of the Lotoo Hy. D. Chads,
Captain, Royal Navy.*

Shwagum Woon, Atawoon.

*Ratified by the Governor-General in Council, at Fort William in Bengal, this Eleventh day of April,
in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty-six, AMHERST,*

COMBERMERE.

J. H. HARINGTON

W. B. BAYLEY.

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